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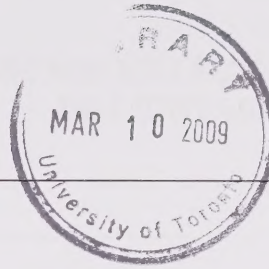


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Thursday 5 March 2009

Jeudi 5 mars 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 5 March 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 5 mars 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

POVERTY REDUCTION ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA RÉDUCTION DE LA PAUVRETÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 4, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario / Projet de loi 152, Loi concernant une stratégie à long terme de réduction de la pauvreté en Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate.

Mr. Michael Prue: I welcome the opportunity today to discuss this important bill, the Poverty Reduction Act. I would like to state at the outset and preface my remarks with a solid and sincere statement that I welcome any opportunity to alleviate poverty to any individual or group of individuals in this province. The question in Bill 152, to my mind, is whether or not it goes far enough and encompasses enough people.

We all know that poverty plagues far too many Ontarians, and this number is increasing as more and more Ontarians lose their jobs. Every morning when I wake up and read the newspaper, every morning when I turn on the news, I see the sad reality of what is happening in Ontario: people losing their jobs. Yesterday, it was Hamilton. This morning's news was shutting down another shift in Windsor. Hundreds upon hundreds, thousands upon thousands of people are losing their job, and the spectre of poverty hangs over all of them.

We know that more and more Ontarians are being forced to rely on social assistance payments and that those payments have declined about 25% since 1994. So even in this time, even after all of this time of affluence, even after all of these years have gone by since 1994, people who are living in poverty and people who are on social assistance are seeing less and less money. We know from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives that the gap between the rich and the poor in Ontario has reached an all-time high, with the richest 10% earning 75 times more than the poorest 10%. I'll put this into

perspective of what is happening in Ontario. Those who are well off earn 75 times as much income as those who are our poorest. Our richest are 75 times richer than our poorest individuals.

We know from the Ontario Association of Food Banks that food bank use has been rising among working Ontarians and in fact most of the food banks report that the majority of people who come in to use their facilities and their services and who take food out actually have a job, sometimes two or three, but they cannot make ends meet. We know from Campaign 2000 that one third of a million Ontario children live in poverty and that Ontario has been called the child poverty capital of Canada. We know from the co-op housing federation that more and more Ontarians are at risk of eviction and homelessness, with 20% of Ontarians paying half their income in rent.

Last night, when I was here in the Legislature, there was a small get-together by the fair rental housing providers, and although we often do not see eye to eye, they told me anecdotally of the number of people who are coming in and simply giving up and telling the rental providers in Ontario that they will be moving out; they can no longer meet the rent.

Beyond these numbers, though, are the stories of individuals who live every day in a situation of poverty. I have lived in poverty; I lived amidst poverty all of my young life. I grew up in Regent Park. I have told this tale many times in this Legislature. It was a life of growing up and seeing people whose hopes were dashed, who never had a chance from the outset; people who had good minds and were skilled and talented, who were forced to leave school at an early age, who never really had a chance. Some of them succumbed to alcohol and drugs. Some of them went to jail. Some of them had disastrous early lives.

I remember those days, growing up there. I remember things that would be very strange and very foreign to people in this Legislature, and perhaps to those watching on television today. I remember growing up where you would see cockroaches and mice on a daily basis. I remember growing up where there would be urine soaked in the halls and you could smell it when you entered the apartment building. I remember the locked basements—they came every day around six o'clock at night and locked the basement so that people couldn't go down into the apartments, because they were afraid of what would take place down there. I remember the scruffiness, and I remember most especially, in the neighbourhoods around Regent Park, that if they knew you were from Regent Park, you were often shunned.

I know how difficult it was for me, as a 14-year-old going to high school, leaving the security of the area at Lord Dufferin school and walking the couple of kilometres to Jarvis Collegiate, where the children and the young people were of a different class. They had money; they had social prestige. I know how insecure that made me feel in those days. If it made me feel insecure, I want to tell you it made my colleagues with whom I grew up in Regent Park feel even more insecure, because I was not a shrinking violet or a wallflower. I was willing to go out there and do what was necessary to get an education. But I know it was a difficult time, and I know that what happened to me is happening thousands upon thousands of times across this province each and every day.

I had an opportunity to take up an invitation by the social housing providers in Toronto a couple of years ago. They invited all the members of this Legislature to spend a week in one of the Ontario Housing projects in or around the Toronto area. I took them up on it. I remember going to live at Jane and Finch. I went with my colleague Marilyn Churley. Together, we braved going every day to Jane and Finch, and back to this Legislature. We lived there. We lived in a place that, I know from media reports, people often consider violent, tough and anti-social. But I want to tell you that what I saw there did not shock me. I saw all the same things of my youth. I saw cockroaches and mice. I saw leaking windows and leaking roofs. I saw buildings in states of extreme disrepair. I saw a place that nobody in this chamber would want to live in.

But I also saw people who held out hope, people who lived there who had hope, if not for themselves then at least for their children, and what they were trying so desperately to do in Jane and Finch. We went into a small, little room with dilapidated couches and things where young people in their teens would come—somewhere to go, somewhere to hang out. There was a wonderful woman, whose name I cannot now remember, who was there. She was considered the mother of Jane and Finch. She counselled the young people and helped them. She helped them to cook some of the meals. For some of them, it was the only meal they got every day. An opportunity to learn and to listen—she counselled them to go back to school when they wanted to drop out.

0910

I also saw some hope there, because I think that the city of Toronto was quite brilliant in what they did. They knew that the houses had to be repaired—the hallways, the walkways and everything else—and when they hired contractors they insisted that the contractors hire some of the local youth, so that those local youth, who had dropped out of school, who had no future, got a job. They got a job and they started to learn a trade. I watched a couple of young men sanding the walls and painting them. Probably, if they didn't do it themselves, they certainly knew who painted the graffiti on there in the first place. But, you know, what happened after that was that they became protectors of the work that they had done and they dissuaded others from coming along and doing

that kind of violence to the halls, to the walls and to the buildings. I saw a couple of young men who were being trained as stonemasons or to lay bricks, because there was some proper bricklaying in the courtyards, where people had taken the bricks out, and they were there to replace them. I'm confident that those bricks would remain in place today.

But I want to say that the despair there was enormous; the despair was enormous and it is continuing. In spite of some of the good things I saw, I know that most of the people who live in Jane-Finch, most of the people who live in Regent Park or Lawrence Heights or any of the dozens and dozens of places of poverty across this province, live daily in despair. I know that in my own riding one of the 13 areas that has been recognized by the United Way of Toronto is Crescent Town. I go there quite often. I have represented Crescent Town continuously in various guises—as councillor, as mayor, as MPP—for the past 21 years. When I go there, I also see people hoping against hope that things will get better; again, if not for themselves, then at least for their children.

They know—but many of us don't—what it means to suffer the ongoing physical pain of hunger and sickness. They know about what it means to be ignored, judged and dismissed for what they don't have and for what they might never have. They know the shame of not being able to provide one's children with what other kids take for granted. The kids know how difficult it is on pizza day when you can't take in the quarter or whatever is required to participate. That is a life that few of us can really understand unless we have to live it or unless we've ever lived it at all.

But we must all understand that poverty not only deeply harms those affected by it, but it also harms and affects the society as a whole. It costs us financially in this province, and it has been estimated as up to \$13 billion a year in lost government revenues and lost economic activity according to the Ontario Association of Food Banks. It also costs us at a much deeper level. Poverty and desperation lead to crime in our communities. Stark inequalities and injustice lead to anger and violence and undermine the trust of our communities. If you want to look at the lowest rates of participation in the political process, I would suggest you go to the poorest communities, and that's exactly what you find. They are disenfranchised, they are disenchanted and they do not participate on a political level or indeed on many other levels. Economic insecurity breeds a preoccupation with oneself and one's family and undermines community solidarity.

We need to do a lot about poverty. The first thing that people want is government action. They ask me all the time, "When is the government going to do something about this?" Just as I was leaving here today I got a phone call in my office from a woman in Ottawa who is demanding action on ODSP. She is on ODSP, and she despairs that this bill is not going to help her. Almost 90% of Ontarians agree that the McGuinty government should reduce poverty by 25% over five years. I'm sur-

prised it's only 90%; I would have hoped it was 100%. But everybody agrees that we need to reduce poverty. Recent polls by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives indicate that over 80% of Ontarians believe that a recession makes it more important than ever to reduce poverty, and it would seem to me that that is precisely what this government should be saying and what they should be doing.

But I despaired a little. A couple of days ago in this very Legislature I had an opportunity to ask a question of the Premier. The Premier answered back, and I don't want to say I liked his answer, in honesty that poverty reduction in his plan will have to look at or have to be predicated on three things: a growing economy—and it's not—help from the federal government—and there's no help forthcoming from there—and a society that embraces that change. I'm still hopeful for the third aspect, but I think the other two cannot, and should not be, conditions for alleviating poverty at this time.

Second, the message from other jurisdictions is that poverty can be reduced through concerted government actions. I look to the province of Quebec in this particular regard. I thank the Library of Parliament because they prepared a wonderful little paper back in 2007 talking about poverty reduction strategies in both Quebec and Newfoundland. I would like to read into the record why I think the Quebec plan has been so effective and so superior to the one that is being proposed here in Ontario.

From page 2 of this report: "Quebec's legislation establishes a 'national strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion' that 'is intended to progressively make Quebec, by 2013, one of the industrialized nations having the least number of persons living in poverty.' The act adopts a definition of poverty that goes beyond a simple relation to low income. Poverty is defined as 'the condition of a human being who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain economic self-sufficiency or to facilitate integration and participation in society,' a definition that integrates the concept of social exclusion."

Flipping over to page 4, this report goes on to state: "The approach adopted in this plan"—that is the Quebec plan—"evokes policies similar to those pursued in some English-speaking European countries such as the United Kingdom and Ireland. The plan promotes 'economic security and social inclusion through employment' and increases 'protection for people with significant employment limitations.'"

"The action plan includes a comprehensive set of initiatives and programs to raise the standard of living of social assistance recipients and low-income earners, and to assist people in making the transition from social assistance to employment. For example, the plan provides for the full indexation of social assistance benefits for those with significant work limitations; the creation of a participation premium for social assistance recipients who are able to work, as well as partial indexation of their benefits; the establishment of a work premium; an increase in the minimum wage; and a new universal

refundable tax credit for low-income families with children. Among other measures, the plan also includes initiatives to improve access to affordable housing, adapt the dwellings of people with disabilities, support employment for people with disabilities, facilitate the integration of immigrants and members of visible minority groups, continue to develop high-quality early learning and child care services, support young parents and children, facilitate the integration of young people into the labour market, support academic success and literacy programs in underprivileged areas, and promote social participation of seniors living on low incomes."

Skipping down a bit: "The government also indicated its intention to work with aboriginal groups to fight poverty and social exclusion."

This, I believe, is a comprehensive program. This is what I had hoped this government would have done. I was present on the day when the government announced its new policy and gave us this shiny booklet *Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy*. I know that the people who were there were well-meaning. I know that when they talked about ending poverty, they had that well-meaning thought in their hearts. But I was disappointed, and profoundly disappointed, and I remain profoundly disappointed because the only poverty reduction strategy that is evident to me here is one that is based on children. Now, I'm happy that children are being helped. I am absolutely delighted. But when I compare what is happening here in Ontario to what happened in Quebec half a decade ago, I have to say that I find us wanting. When I compare what is happening here to what I see happening in other jurisdictions around the world, I find this strategy wanting.

0920

The government of Quebec has succeeded in reducing their poverty rate from 19.3% in 1997 to 11.8% in 2005. That is a huge reduction. They went about it in a great way. They did not just isolate only a few of the poor as deserving. They did not say it is only children and people who have children in their families who are going to benefit from the poverty reduction strategy. They looked to everyone. They recognized that poor people, whether they have children or not, are in desperate need of help from their government.

I look at what is happening in other jurisdictions. The government of Ireland has succeeded in reducing its long-term rate of poverty from 5.8% in 2003 to 3.7% in 2005. The United Kingdom government managed to lift 800,000 children out of poverty between 1997 and 2005. All of these governments, every single one of them, developed and implemented comprehensive poverty reduction strategies to help achieve these results. They set public targets—I know this government has set targets too—and they set targets for all, for everyone. They set targets not just for children; they set them for everyone.

They also took action on a number of common areas. They increased social assistance rates. They invested in affordable housing and child care. They increased minimum wages. They invested in public education and employment training.

About three or four years ago in this province, community activists noticed other jurisdictions—Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador—were having success in reducing poverty through the development of poverty reduction plans. They feared that Ontario was falling behind and, in 2007, they put considerable effort to convince this government to change. I think they did a good job. Quite honestly, I think they did quite a brilliant job to get government moving in this province. An impressive array of labour, faith, social services, health and anti-poverty groups came together to form a coalition to push the Ontario government to commit to develop a poverty reduction strategy. They were out there yesterday. I went out and talked to them yesterday and the day before yesterday. There was a little tent in front of this Legislature and there were some poverty activists. When I went out to talk to them, they told me they prayed for me. I was welcoming of that. They also told me they prayed for everyone else in this Legislature. I'm welcoming of that as well, because what they want us to do is the right thing, and what I am asking this government to do is the right thing.

I think that the poverty reduction strategy that has been set out for children is a fine document. I guess, like the proverbial *Oliver Twist*, I am coming and saying: "I want more. I want more. I've got my soup bowl in my hand. I want more." The poverty activists were successful in getting the McGuinty government to publicly commit to develop and implement a poverty reduction strategy in Ontario, but I want more. What has been done or what is proposed to be done for children needs to be done for all of those others who live in poverty.

We are concerned that because it is not, it fails to include key actions such as improving access to affordable housing and child care and increasing social assistance rates and the minimum wage. These were all very successful actions in other jurisdictions. We have made it clear that the plan, as it currently stands, is seriously underfunded. We acknowledge the introduction of the plan and we recognize that it is a significant step in the right direction, but now we're asking the government to do more. We're looking at the economic turmoil of this province. We are looking at literally tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of primary breadwinners losing their job or jobs and we're looking at a whole economic downturn that is going to affect not only children, but literally hundreds of thousands of hard-working people.

The government has responded, again, but we don't think it's enough. We believe that people living in poverty in this province and all Ontarians deserve more than that. To be worthwhile, it must actually lead to differences in poor people's lives in places like Windsor, which has the country's highest unemployment rate, in places like North Bay and Kingston, where poverty is increasing at an enormous and alarming rate.

Mr. Paul Miller: We're catching up.

Mr. Michael Prue: My colleague here from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek has just reminded me that Hamilton is fast catching up. With the layoffs announced at Stelco, or

US Steel as it's now called, over the last couple of days, we know that poverty in that city is going to rise exponentially. To this end, we want to be constructively critical of the bill, for we do feel that as currently worded, it has significant weaknesses.

We need to monitor the indicators that measure the causes of poverty, not just the effects. We need to know what causes poverty. I do know it's not like Dickensian times where it's some moral weakness that you're poor. I never saw any moral weakness in the people who lived in Regent Park. I saw people who struggled; people with disabilities.

One of my neighbours, the couple were both blind. I remember that they struggled in their poverty. I remember single mothers who worked there, who were abused and had to get out and who looked after their children as best they could, and how they struggled in poverty. I saw people who were new immigrants who came and could not get jobs in their chosen field and who struggled at low-wage jobs and how they struggled in poverty. I saw a lot of hard-working people who worked in factories, who worked for minimum wage or near-minimum wage, who struggled in poverty too. It is not a moral weakness, and we ought never to think that. We need to know why they are constantly stuck there and the causes of that poverty.

It requires government to regularly report on or review their plans in consultation with Ontarians, including low-income Ontarians. One of the things that despaired me, and I'm glad the minister's here today, is that there was a poverty consultation. She knows, and I think all the members of this Legislature know, how central and crucial this is to me personally. I grew up there, and I promised myself as a very young man—because I was politically keen and active and wanting to get involved, even in grade 9—that one day, if I ever became a politician, I would do something about the place where I lived and the people who lived there and the people like me. I was disappointed, and I will state that I am still disappointed, that the poverty consultations throughout this government's time were by invitation only. I was disappointed, when I attended myself as a member of this Legislature, to be denied access to the first four places that I wanted to attend to hear what poor people and others had to say.

We went out and we did our own poverty consultation. We went out and talked to poor people, and we especially invited those who lived in poverty. We made extraordinary efforts by providing food so that they could come. We offered subway tokens here in Toronto and car passes in Ottawa and in places so that people could come. We offered babysitting services so that single mothers could show up and tell us what it was like. We heard from poor people, and what we heard did not surprise me at all: the hope in their hearts for their children and for themselves and the very common solutions that they thought could alleviate their poverty. But it requires a government to listen to them and to regularly report and review their plans in consultations with Ontarians, especially low-income Ontarians.

I'd like to point out again some more stuff about the Quebec model. It can be noted at the outset that the Quebec law comes in at about 6,500 words, not that words are all that important, whereas Bill 152 is less than 1,000 words. Perhaps it is fitting that the Quebec law is six times longer, since the Quebec government invested about six times as much money in their strategy on a per capita basis as the Ontario government is proposing to invest in theirs. Of course, longer bills are not necessarily better. But in this case, the Quebec act is in many ways stronger and more comprehensive than Bill 152.

0930

I want to speak about three ways in which this is true.

First, this sets no ongoing specific and strong targets for poverty reduction. It does require the current government to pursue its current 25-in-5 target, but it sets no minimal guidelines for future poverty reduction targets. In other words, future governments can choose to set poverty reduction targets as low as they choose. That's what's here in this bill. The 25-in-5 target might well become 5 in 25 in the future. Additionally, written into the preamble to the act is the following escape clause—and this is what I talked to the Premier about the other day: "The implementation and success of the strategy will require the sustained commitment of all levels of government, all sectors of Ontario society and a growing economy." So there in this bill is the escape clause for this government. As the economic conditions worsen, as the federal government says they're not going to be participants or as the public say they're not willing to have their taxes raised, as invariably will happen, this government has set out in the preamble of their own bill an escape clause.

The Premier has regularly stated that without economic growth and billions of dollars in federal money the province can't meet its 25% poverty reduction target. This was written into the poverty reduction plan that was released in December, and the bill reiterates these conditions.

One has to wonder, what is the use of enshrining a requirement to set targets for poverty reduction if that requirement is contingent on so many vague conditions outside the control of the government? Governments are begging off action all the time by blaming other levels of government. I hear it in this Legislature almost every day. I hear the government talking about the government in Ottawa. I hear the government saying, "Oh, that's a municipal concern." I believe that this is a concern to all of us.

In contrast, the Quebec poverty reduction law sets strong and precise targets for their poverty reduction strategy, namely to progressively make Quebec one of the industrialized nations having the least number of persons living in poverty by 2013. That is the kind of goal that is needed in Bill 152, not unspecified targets with escape clauses.

The second thing is that there is a problem in the lack of comprehensiveness of this bill. There is no requirement in Bill 152 that the poverty reduction strategies

developed be comprehensive. From the start, the Premier and the minister have repeatedly promised a comprehensive poverty strategy for Ontario. However, as I have already mentioned, the government's current strategy focuses only on children. It ignores other groups at risk of poverty: seniors, youth, people with disabilities, women, unattached adults, people of colour, aboriginal people and new immigrants.

I had an opportunity, a day or two after the government released its report, to attend a news conference. It was held by the Colour of Poverty campaign. They released a report, and I would like to read a little bit from this report because it is chilling. It is absolutely and totally chilling what is happening to people in our society. The Colour of Poverty campaign starts out, "Greater Trouble in Greater Toronto—Child Poverty in the GTA (Report - Children's Aid Society of Toronto - December 2008)."

It goes on: "Poverty is racialized, that is, disproportionate to people of colour who are Canadian-born and newcomers. Among broad ethno-racial groups in the Toronto CMA, the 2000 LICO before-tax rates of child poverty were about"—and here's where it gets chilling—

"—one child in 10 in low income among global European groups;

"—one child in five for East Asian groups;

"—one child in four for aboriginal, South Asian, Caribbean, South and Central American groups;

"—one child in three for children of Arab and West Asian groups; and

"—one child in two for children of African groups.

"Rates of LICO-BT family poverty among two-parent families in 2000 range from between 5% for European groups to 29% for Arabic and West Asian groups. Rates of family poverty among female lone-parent families range from between 26% for European groups and 65% for African groups."

This is the great problem that I had on the day that this poverty report was released. I was perhaps the lone person at the news conference who did not effuse about how wonderful this was. I looked at it as a lost opportunity. Although I still welcome what is being done for children, I wonder what is happening to seniors, to our youth, to people with disabilities, to women, to unattached adults, to people of colour, to aboriginal people and new immigrants, and I am still disappointed.

I have spoken in this Legislature before—and I want to say it again today—about people with disabilities. People are disabled almost always through no fault of their own. Whether they were born with a disability or whether they developed one as a result of an accident or a disease, we in this province ought not to be treating them as people who are destined forever to live in poverty. In this province, ODSP rates are abysmally low. The maximum you can get in this province on ODSP is \$999 a month or just short of \$12,000 a year. That is approximately \$8,000 below the low-income cut-off figure, which defines poverty for a single person. Most people on ODSP have no children for whom they collect addi-

tional benefits. That should not surprise people when you understand that the disabled who were born that way or who became that way early in life generally do not have children—or if they had them, if they're older and they're disabled, the children are grown up, because disability often happens in older age. It is not surprising. So any poverty strategy that targets only children leaves them completely out.

When you look at a disabled person, you see how they struggle, how they want and need to belong to society. I have pointed out to this minister, to other ministers and to the Premier on numerous occasions, and I give the example again today, that the child born in this province with Down's syndrome grows up, and we attempt as best we can in society to give them the education and the training that they require in order to function as best they can, and we do, I think, a pretty admirable job. But that child grows up to be 18 or 19 years of age, and generally, the education system ceases to work. I mean, I wish it didn't, but it does: It ceases to work. We can get them through high school, we can do that—and I'm proud that we can do that, because we couldn't do that when I was a young man, but we can today.

But then that young person wants to go out and contribute. They want to go out and get a job. They want to go out and do things and be somebody, and they go out and get a job. I have seen people stacking shelves, I have seen people sweeping floors, I have seen people working in McDonald's and in other stores. But the sad reality is, because we give them \$12,000 a year for being disabled, this government claws back half of everything they earn. I know that there's a little bit they get to keep at first, but after just a little, tiny period, they start to claw back everything that they earn so that you have to literally earn about \$18,000 a year to keep the \$8,000 that will bring them from \$12,000 to \$20,000 so that you can, in your life, live above the poverty line. I think that that is disgraceful in this province; I think it is absolutely and fundamentally disgraceful.

When I ask the Minister of Community and Social Services this question on numerous occasions, she says that it's not an income supplement plan, the ODSP—you can call it what you want—but I do say it is a plan that puts that person, through no fault of their own, in everlasting poverty, because trying as hard as they might, trying to fit in as hard as they might, trying to get that job as hard as they might and to work all the hours that can be given to them, they cannot ever hope not to be in poverty.

I've just given the example of someone with Down's syndrome, but it's equally true of many other diseases, it's equally true of many other afflictions: People want to contribute. Sometimes it's limited; sometimes it's very limited, that they can only go out a day or two because their physical health will only allow it or because of the work environment or their capabilities. But I don't want that money to ever be clawed back again.

I asked in estimates how much this government clawed back from all of the programs. It was about \$850

million; that was the answer I finally got. It took, I don't know, 10 or 12 weeks for that answer to come forward. That's how much this government makes off the backs of the poor. They claw it back.

0940

I'm suggesting that there should be something in this poverty strategy to end that. I would suggest it start with people who are disabled. The disabled should be allowed to keep the first \$8,000 a year without having it clawed back, so that disabled persons do not have to live in poverty for the rest of their lives. I think that's a strategy that, if you went out on the street and asked people, every single person would agree with. Nobody wants the disabled to live in poverty. If they are capable of working and they can make \$8,000 a year, I would like to let them keep it.

I don't feel good about knowing that \$850 million is clawed back from all the groups and that at least half of that is clawed back from the disabled. I don't feel good, and I don't think this government should feel good. I think any poverty strategy has to look first and foremost at our disabled, because being disabled in this province and in this country means that you will live a life of poverty.

I also want to talk about our First Nations people. I've had an opportunity, since coming to this Legislature, to travel across Ontario. I have had a chance to go into First Nations communities that are accessible by road, and I've had a chance to go into many of those northern places that are not, places like Attawapiskat and Peawanuck and Fort Severn and Marten Falls (Ogoki), where the only way you can get there is by plane. You go into those places and see the poverty and the despair, and you see what is happening to our First Nations people.

Now, I know that some people opposite and even some on this side will say this is a federal jurisdiction, but I also know that we have an obligation. I also know that the province of Quebec has recognized the unique structure of our federation and the uniqueness of our First Nations community. They have endeavoured, notwithstanding that it's a federal jurisdiction, to do everything they can to alleviate our first peoples from poverty.

I go into places like Peawanuck and Attawapiskat and look at the enormous cost of everything. I told one of my colleagues, Mr. Zimmer from Willowdale, that the biggest education he was going to get in a particular town—I think it was Fort Albany at that point—was to go in to the Northern Store. That was going to be his biggest education, not the ramshackle houses, not the poverty, not the kids hanging around with nothing to do, not the lack of a good school. The biggest education he was going to get was going into the Northern Store. He went into the Northern Store with me and came out with his eyes bulging, because in that location, a bag of potatoes that can be bought for \$2 in Toronto cost \$25; a bag of milk to give to your kids, which could be bought for \$3 or \$4 in Toronto, cost \$30; two apples cost \$12.

Do you know the only thing that didn't surprise him and didn't surprise me? The two things that cost the same

as in Toronto were a can of Coke and potato chips—exactly the same. You wonder about the nutrition of those kids. If you go into the schools that had to be shut down—there's no money—because of the fumes from the diesel generators that were in them, if you go and see the electricity that is shut off every day, if you go and see that about 80% of the people live on some form of assistance and you look at that community, then your heart has to go out to them and you have to say, "Why do we have this poverty in Ontario?"

The line between Ontario and Quebec runs right down the middle of James Bay, just on the other side of Moosonee and Moose Factory. If you go to the other side of James Bay and look at the First Nations community, you will see a starkly different world. You will see roads and sewers and schools. You will see people in prosperity who have jobs. You will see costs that are enormously lower than on the Ontario side. The reason is that the government of Quebec has invested billions of dollars into those communities. Part of that, I would agree, comes from the James Bay Project and the hydroelectricity and the need to get the communities on board. But they have continued to develop those communities to the place where they are very little different from southern Ontario, and the level of poverty and despair is not there.

When I look at this bill, I'm saddened to see there is only passing mention of First Nations communities. We cannot live and acknowledge and know of this poverty. I know it is hidden from most Ontarians. I know it's difficult for most Ontarians to hop on a plane and go to Marten Falls-Ogoki, Peawanuck, Fort Albany or Attawapiskat, probably names they couldn't even find on a map. It's difficult. But it exists and it's there and we know it. Everybody in this room knows it and there's nothing in here about that.

There's nothing in here really about the whole issue of new immigrants. I have also talked about this many times in this Legislature, the whole issue of people who come to this country. Some of them are fleeing violence; some are coming here for economic gain, not so much for themselves but usually for their children. They have hopes and dreams in coming to this country that their children will have an enormous opportunity in terms of education and opportunity. When I worked at the immigration department for some 20 years, before I became a full-time politician, you could see at the airport and the landing sites that hope and gleam in their eyes; how they wanted to come here and make a success of themselves, yet that is not happening and I don't see anything in this bill to deal with that.

I have advocated and will continue to advocate that Ontario should take a much stronger position on immigration than we do. Other provinces, particularly Quebec, take a much stronger position, as does Manitoba, in helping to recruit new immigrants. Quebec even has its own grid system and visa officers, and there is nothing that would prevent Ontario from doing the same thing. I believe we should be doing that in order to bring people to this country and for them to know in advance that their

skills and abilities will be recognized. As the choosers of the immigrants, we are also the ones who assess the documentation they bring forward. We can do that while the applications are being processed, so that a doctor or a nurse or an engineer or a nuclear scientist in another world jurisdiction will know in advance that when they come to this country, when they come to this province particularly, their credentials will be recognized and it is more likely than not they will be able to work in their field and they will not then succumb to poverty. I would suggest that the government needs to do that and it is a strategy that is not outside of this strategy of poverty.

The McGuinty government poverty strategy also fails to take comprehensive action on a full range of areas related to poverty. As mentioned, it fails to improve access to affordable housing and child care and fails to improve adequacy of social assistance rates. The rates are far too low. The rates are absolutely abysmal and I know when they were frozen for eight or nine long years in a row, huge—first of all they were reduced by 21% and then they were frozen for all of those years. People who live on those rates cannot do so, they cannot live. I would challenge any one of you to try to live on what is taken home.

Twice in my political career, once as mayor and later on as a megacity councillor, I took up the challenge of the Daily Bread Food Bank to try to live on a welfare diet for a week. The first time I did it for nine days because I wanted to prove that I could. The second time I did it for 10, again, to prove that I could, and it's a real stretch.

The first time, I was given \$12 to feed myself for a week and it taught me some incredibly valuable lessons, the biggest one of which was when I went out as the mayor following a council meeting. A councillor's wife had had a baby and he wanted to take us out to celebrate, but I had promised not to ingest anything other than the \$12 allotted to me. So when they came around with food and stuff, I declined. I did want to be part of the group though, so I had a Diet Coke. To my chagrin, at the end of the night, because I had wanted to be part of the group and living the welfare diet, when the bill came for the Diet Coke in the restaurant, it was more than \$2. I understood from that more than any other thing what it is to live in poverty and on welfare, because that literally meant the next day I couldn't eat. Because I had a Diet Coke in the restaurant and I wanted to be part of a group and belong, I couldn't eat. So the next day I didn't. That's the daily life of a person on welfare.

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The second time I went on the welfare diet was a few years later, and because transportation and other costs had risen, I had \$10 for 10 days. I ate a whole bunch of starchy things, skipped every breakfast and most lunches. Dinner was always the same thing. What was on sale that week was chicken legs for 79 cents a pound, and that's what I had. I had chicken every day. I made chicken soup. I did everything I could to stretch that \$10. But both times, I lost four pounds in a week. This might be the new fad—go on the welfare diet. Get rid of Atkins

and all of those other people, just try to live on the welfare diet in Ontario. There's nothing in here about that. I am looking forward to a budget that actually does something about those who are on social assistance, giving them adequacy.

I saw the Toronto Sun today. The Toronto Sun likes great big huge headlines. They're talking about some doctor in Chinatown who is giving letters to people so that they can have sufficient nutrition, and "Isn't this a scandal?" I think the bigger scandal is that we give them \$500 a month on which to live. It is not surprising that they can't eat. It's not surprising that almost everything they put in their mouths they get from friends, the Daily Bread Food Bank or one of the social agencies, or they go without. That's the bigger scandal to me. I would like the Toronto Sun, if they're listening, to write a story about that. How does one exist on \$548 a month if you're a single person? In the city of Toronto, it costs you that for a single room. There's nothing left.

We need to start looking at the welfare rates. I know that this government will stand—and they've stood before and told me they've raised the rates five times, and they have. They've raised the rates five times in six years. But they've raised them incrementally at such a low amount that it has not, at 9.2% overall, covered the cost of inflation in the last six years—it has not. So a single person today—not families—on welfare or ODSP is worse off than in the deepest, darkest days of Mike Harris, and that's pretty sad.

If you want to do something about poverty, you have to do something about those who live on assistance—ODSP, Ontario Works. I would suggest that since we're going to have so many people joining these ranks in the next year or two that we look at increasing those rates well above the rates of inflation. Inflation this year is only going to be 1% or 2%. Things are really bad; that's what's happening. I look at the inflation numbers; they're down around 1% or 2%. If the government comes back and gives 1% or 2%, then it's not going to alleviate all of the problems that have manifested themselves over the last many, many years.

Bill 152 lacks a requirement that the current or future poverty reduction strategies be comprehensive. It leaves open the possibility that future strategies will be even more restrictive than the current one in terms of which populations of low-income people are included and what range of initiatives are adopted. Quebec law does better. It requires that a comprehensive range of actions be included in its poverty reduction strategies and it requires, by law, actions to: (1) promote access to employment; (2) strengthen the social safety net; (3) improve education; (4) provide work supplements for low-income workers; (5) improve the availability of decent and affordable housing; (6) improve access to early learning programs and child care for children; and (7) increase supports to seniors.

Quebec law ensures comprehensiveness both in terms of target populations and the range of government initiatives needed to reduce poverty; Bill 152 does not.

Quebec's law also sets clear goals that ensure that their poverty strategy gets at the causes of poverty by requiring that strategies reduce inequality, increase solidarity between citizens, reduce prejudice, and improve social and economic conditions. For example, the Quebec law states: "Action to strengthen the social and economic safety net must be aimed at ... raising the level of income granted to persons and families living in poverty ... to meet their essential needs."

The third key concern I have with this bill as it currently stands is its failure to forge new ground in ensuring citizen participation and public accountability. The McGuinty government has talked a lot about the importance of working in partnership with Ontarians on poverty reduction and in working in collaboration with low-income people in particular. However, Bill 152, as it currently stands, misses a wonderful opportunity to put in place new, more deliberative and meaningful forms of citizen participation. In fact, it calls for little beyond the usual tired ways of government consultation. The model is still that the ministry decides when consultation is necessary; the government solicits information and input; and then the government officials go away and decide what needs to be done. That's the way it happens around here. Despite calls from the 25 in 5 Network, the government chose not to include new and more direct forms of accountability, such as a citizens' advisory committee, which the network called for. Nor did the government put in place a poverty reduction secretariat to coordinate action on poverty between ministries—another recommendation of the 25 in 5 Network.

Contrary to that, Quebec's law, in contrast, includes a number of innovative measures to increase transparency and public accountability on poverty reduction. It formed an advisory committee to advise the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity on the planning, implementation and evaluation of the poverty strategy. This committee monitors government policies to ensure that they are moving the poverty reduction strategy forward. That's the job of the committee. The act enshrines a social initiatives fund to promote the emergence of local strategies to fight poverty and social exclusion in designated priority areas. The fund stood at \$16 million a year in 2004-05. I am aware that the McGuinty poverty plan includes a community mobilization fund, but it is only going to be funded at \$5 million a year, and it is not enshrined in the legislation. So it's one third of what Quebec puts in—Quebec has fewer people than we do—and it's not enshrined in the legislation.

In addition, the Quebec law created a new research centre to provide reliable and rigorous information on poverty in the province to help assess the extent to which the government's strategy is actually reducing poverty. A further important requirement is that all ministers must consider and report on the potential impacts of new legislation or regulations on people living in poverty. This bill does not do that either.

In summary, poverty reduction strategies and poverty reduction acts do have a significant potential to stimulate

effective action to reduce poverty. But to actually have the intended impact, poverty reduction acts and strategies need strong targets. They need to be comprehensive. They need to ensure strong citizen participation and government accountability.

I am hoping that when this bill goes to committee, as it surely will, the government takes heed of what is being said in this Legislature, but more importantly takes heed of what the 25 in 5 coalition is trying to say, what the good people who are out praying on the lawn have to say, what the people who live in poverty have to say, and makes some meaningful changes. I welcome, as I said at the outset, that we are going to do something to help poor children. I grew up among many poor children. I grew up with children who didn't really have a chance, children who came to school in dishevelled clothes, who didn't have enough food to eat, who were constantly sick or at risk of being sick, who dropped out of school at the end of grade 9 or grade 10 to go out and get worthless and meaningless jobs that paid minimum wage, because there was nothing else they could do. I don't want to see that happen again. So as I said, I welcome anything that is going to stop that kind of child poverty from continuing. But I am also mindful and I am also asking the government to show some pathos, to show some pity for those who are living in poverty today who are not children. I have talked about the disabled. I have talked about our First Nations communities. I have talked about new immigrants. I think there's a very strong case to be made for senior citizens, and for all of those people who, through no fault of their own, are living in conditions of poverty that none of us in this room would want to live in, and in fact none of us do live in.

I am asking the government to make a fair bill—I'm not going to say a good one, but a fair bill; a good bill; an excellent bill. I'm asking for this government to look at what can be done, what needs to be done, and do not ignore a whole generation of people who live in poverty, a whole generation who are disabled, a whole generation who live in abysmal poverty in northern and isolated communities and on the streets of our big cities. Look at them and see what we can do to help them while we're helping children. We need to do that, and we need to be bold.

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I will tell you, if you raise the social assistance rates and the ODSP rates by 10%, I will be over here clapping. I know not all members of the Legislature will be clapping, but I will guarantee you that I will be one of those who say, "This government understands it." This government needs to take that kind of bold initiative and this kind of bold step.

Every day I see what is happening in the stock market. Every day I read the papers about those who are losing their jobs. Every day I despair, if we are not going to take that kind of bold action, of the social turmoil that will result in this province.

March 26 is a key day. I don't know what's going to happen, but I do know what I heard from the Premier, again going back. He's looking for an expanding econ-

omy, which is not happening, he's looking for a federal government that is not supportive, and he's looking for people in Ontario to be supportive and do what they can. I believe that the last one is the only one that's there. I believe the last one: that the people of Ontario will support a government that takes this initiative even in trying times, even in deficit, even if taxes have to increase to make sure that those among us who live in such dire straits have an opportunity.

I ask the minister to do everything in her power to convince her colleagues in cabinet that this bill is not enough. I know in her heart of hearts she knows it's not enough. I'm asking that the effort be made to make this into a bill that will make all Ontarians proud and that will take literally hundreds of thousands of people off the poverty rolls and give them the kind of dignity, the kind of opportunity, that they have never before and that they can only dream of.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I want to start by thanking the member from Beaches–East York. This is clearly an area that drives him. He is here in politics to help those with less than they deserve and less than they need. I want to thank you for your passion, I want to thank you for your understanding, and I want to thank you for your ongoing commitment to making the lives of those living in poverty better.

I have to say that it is a refreshing contrast to some of the other speeches that have been made on this bill coming from the Conservative Party. I have been terribly disappointed at the lack of understanding and just the ignorance that has been expressed by members of the Conservative Party when it comes to this legislation, so I thank the member of Beaches–East York for taking the time to understand what it is we are trying to do.

We are starting with children. Reducing poverty in this province—it's going to take us a long time to get to where we want to go. We had a very difficult decision: Where do we start? We chose to start with breaking the cycle of poverty because, the member opposite knows, there are families in Ontario where there is an intergenerational cycle of poverty out of which it is very difficult to break. We want to give kids the opportunities to achieve their full potential. We had to start somewhere. Starting with kids is the right place to start. However, all people living in poverty will be better off as the result of this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I found the words of my colleague from Beaches–East York to be rather interesting, especially when he related his own experiences at trying to be somebody who lived in poverty for a day or even a week. It's not something that I've tried—not that I have not experienced poverty when I was a young boy. I'm pretty sure that you would describe my parents' conditions as being such, but they always hid it well from me.

There is no disagreement in this House, I don't think, on the part of any party that poverty is an issue for On-

tarians and a growing issue, one that will grow exponentially, very sadly, over the next period of time. The issue we're discussing is how you address it, not whether or not it's there. I think there's a fundamental disagreement between the three parties on the way to go at it, not the fact that it should be done.

I take umbrage at what the minister has said in her response—albeit I acknowledge the fact that as a minister it's great that she's here and listening—to the comments about the Conservative Party, the party that I represent, being in some way ignorant about it.

The difference between the Liberal approach, which is too little, too late—and it's been on your watch, Minister, for almost six years, okay? You're not going to address poverty with a strategy that is weak; you're going to address it with one that's strong. It dovetails with pretty well everything we're doing and facing in Ontario now, with people losing jobs in the thousands. The Conservative Party's approach to this has always been, and remains, to preserve the dignity of the person at an individual level and to create conditions that allow everyone to earn a paycheque that allows everyone to have a job. That's what the Liberal strategy doesn't address, and on the NDP side it's "Tax double, and we'll redistribute it."

You can't have it all of these ways. You've got to have it one way. I say the personal dignity route wins.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: First of all, when somebody does something or tries to do something that's decent, they should at least get acknowledgement. I do believe that the minister's heart is in the right place. I do believe they're trying to address children's poverty in the province. But I must concur with my colleague from Beaches–East York; he hit a real chord when he talked about the total poverty issue.

Speaking from my own personal experiences, I can remember in 1990, when I was on strike at Stelco, that we had a five-month strike. I missed mortgage payments. I had three little girls. I even went and got my cab licence and drove cabs 16 to 18 hours a day in Hamilton, with not a lot of business, due to the strike. I was lucky if I took home \$30 a day for 16 or 18 hours. But I did it to feed my girls and keep my family together. But I could not even imagine what it would be like to live every day of your life in that situation. It would be just terrible. It creates social problems. It creates divorces. It creates havoc in the community. In my community, 18% of the people are already below the poverty level—this was before the devastating news at Stelco—so I can only assume that it's going to get worse before it gets better.

This bill does not go far enough. To my colleagues from the Conservatives: You don't get by on dignity. You get by on help, you get by on a cheque, you get by on support from social services, and that definitely has to be addressed.

We don't want to give away the store, but I think priorities in both parties are a little mixed up. The people come first, not your—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: J'ai écouté attentivement les points soulevés par mon collègue de Beaches–East York. Laissez-moi vous dire que, lorsqu'il a référé au temps de sa jeunesse, les temps ont changé.

I keep saying that times have changed, and every one of us has a role to play.

La pauvreté du temps des années 1930, 1940, 1950 et 1960 est complètement différente de la pauvreté des années 2000. Il faut dire que dans les années 1930 et 1940, on pouvait s'assurer chaque matin que nous aurions trois repas. La nutrition était complètement différente. Les collations n'existaient pas avant le coucher.

Mais aujourd'hui la pauvreté est complètement différente. Aujourd'hui on s'aperçoit que les enfants se rendent à l'école le matin avec l'estomac vide. Personne ne vient les aider. Les parents n'ont pas l'argent nécessaire. C'est pour ça que le gouvernement McGuinty reconnaît l'importance de mettre en place ce projet de loi, pour essayer de réduire la pauvreté. Tous les cinq ans on va regarder de nouveau les progrès que nous avons faits, et c'est très important, pour que le gouvernement McGuinty puisse avoir l'appui des deux partis de l'opposition afin de pousser davantage l'importance de répondre aux besoins.

Il y a certainement des objectifs qu'on doit rencontrer. Lorsque je dis qu'on doit réduire la pauvreté par 25 % d'ici cinq ans, laissez-moi vous dire que c'est avec consultation et le rôle que chacun d'entre nous va jouer afin de venir en aide au gouvernement McGuinty et au projet de loi qui est débattu ce matin; que tout le monde joue un rôle d'importance pour atteindre notre objectif.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Merci beaucoup. I'll now return to the member for Beaches–East York, who has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Michael Prue: I would like to thank the Minister of Children and Youth Services and my colleagues from Thornhill, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for their comments. It seems readily apparent to me from their comments that all of them listened to what I had to say. So this is a good thing.

To the member from Thornhill, though, you know he talked about the dignity of the person. I agree that dignity of a human being is an absolutely essential aspect for each and every one of us, but I asked him to reflect on the thought of the dignity of a person or how difficult it is to have dignity when one lives in destitution, when one lives in poverty, when one lives in hopelessness and in disease, when you are sick all the time because you don't have the proper food, when you don't have the opportunity to get a good job—that try as hard as you might, you cannot escape from that grinding and crushing poverty of the place where you live.

I asked him to think about that dignity of the person. It is that which I am talking about and that which I want the minister and others to reflect upon as well. That's why people need a hand up—not a handout but a hand up—in order to get out of that, to get an opportunity to develop

themselves. I do agree that they have to work at it, too. We all agree they have to work at it.

In terms of taxing double, the accusation, never did I say that I would tax people double. What I'm saying is that this government and all governments have to have priorities. I believe that this is a priority whose time has come. It can no longer be allowed to fester. If there is a priority in this upcoming budget cycle on March 26, I believe that that priority has to be poverty, and I will judge that tax bill and that budget on March 26 by what it contains on this issue and this issue alone.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading debate adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Orders of the day. I recognize the Minister of Culture.

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: There is no further business this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That being the case, this House stands adjourned until 10:30 later on this morning.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. David Zimmer: It's my great pleasure to introduce Wendy Yan, who's in the gallery here. Wendy is the proud mother of page Xiao Yan Guo, who is over here. Xiao Yan is a student at Bayview Middle School in Willowdale. She has come to observe her daughter participate in the proceedings. Welcome.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'd like to introduce some people in the west members' gallery. Tariq Haji is one of the pages in this session, and his parents—Farhana Haji, his mother, and Hanif Haji, his father—and Alysa Haji, his sister, are all here to support him. I'd like to welcome them to the gallery and congratulate Tariq on the wonderful job that he has done as a page.

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I also am lucky enough to have gotten a page. Zaman Dubey has been here as a page for the last couple of weeks. His parents have come to observe him this morning: his father, Zakir, his mother, Asma, and his brother, Abbas. Welcome.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Today in the government gallery, I am expecting from my deputy minister's office Peter Evans, Michael Dougherty, Tina Lee, Deeple Vyas and Melanie Lucas. They are great people who work with me every day, and I'm delighted that they're going to be here today with us.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm pleased to introduce Lee McKenna from the Association of Ontario Health Centres, who's in the gallery, as well as Heather Brown from the Ontario Nurses' Association.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Vaughan and page Arjun Gandhi, I'd like

to welcome his mother, Hema Gandhi, his father, Sanjay Gandhi, and his sister, Anjali Gandhi, sitting in the east members' gallery today. Welcome.

We have with us in the Speaker's gallery His Excellency Tomaz Kunstelj, Ambassador from the Republic of Slovenia to Canada, accompanied by the Honorary Consul General of the Republic of Slovenia at Toronto, Mr. Joseph Slobodnik. Please join me in welcoming our guests to the Legislature today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

NURSES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Health. Today, nurses from across Ontario have travelled to Queen's Park because they are very concerned that your policies are forcing hospitals to lay off nurses, eliminate nursing positions and not fill vacancies. They're also concerned that you broke your promise to hire 9,000 more nurses.

Minister, will you take action today to stop the elimination of nursing positions in our hospitals, and will you commit to funding at least 3,000 new nursing positions in your 2009-10 budget?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member for the question because we on this side of the House feel that nurses are an incredible cornerstone of our health care services. In fact, it's their expertise, their skill and their dedication which have meant so much for us to be able to drive down wait times, to be able to engage in new models of family health care, like nurse practitioner-led clinics, which we have moved to. That's why this government and the commitment of this Premier to hire 8,000 nurses in our first term has been a promise fulfilled. In fact, so far we are at almost 10,000 nurses hired in the province of Ontario. And, yes, the member is quite correct: We do have a plan to hire an additional 9,000 nurses in the province of Ontario. We are proceeding with that; I can confirm that for the member. It is perhaps going to take us a little bit longer than we had originally anticipated, but I do want to assure this member and all members of the House that we are proceeding with hiring an additional 9,000—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Despite all the blubber and the rhetoric coming from the other side, I would suggest to you that the nurses have come to Queen's Park today to protest because they do not feel that the government policies are creating the new nursing positions that were promised, and they're also concerned about the firings throughout the province.

We've seen 72 nursing positions gone from the Rouge Valley Health System. Sault Ste. Marie: five critical care RN positions; two oncology. Quinte Health Care cut the equivalent of 45 full-time nursing positions. Cambridge will eliminate 30 full-time—and it goes on and on.

Mr. Minister, if your government is not cutting nursing positions, then why have these nurses travelled to Queen's Park today to protest your cuts?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, nurses are being hired today in the province of Ontario. If you were to go to one of the job sites, Workopolis for example, you will find somewhere between 300 and 400 positions for nurses in the province of Ontario today.

In fact, the record of this member and her government, when they were on this side of the House just a few short years ago—a quote from Premier Mike Harris: “Just as hula hoops went out and those workers had to have a factory and a company that would manufacture something else that’s in, it’s the same in government,” Harris told reporters before a cabinet meeting when referring specifically to nurses. In fact, that member was a part of a government that fired nurses in its first year, to the tune of 6,300 nursing positions lost in the province of Ontario. I’m happy to contrast that record with the record of success of this government in hiring over 10,000 nurses today in the province of Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: It’s obvious that this minister is incapable of dealing with the crisis at hand.

We are very proud of our record. Between 1999 and 2001, we created 12,000 more nursing positions—nursing positions that we have been recognized for by the RNAO.

However, today the nurses are here to protest your policies. It’s time for you to assume responsibility and not go back years and years and years.

I say to you today, your Premier said he would not fire nurses. I’ve got the quotes right here.

Do you not know, Minister, that the research that ONA has states that every patient added to the workload of a registered nurse increases the rate of complications and patient deaths by 7%? That’s what your policies are forcing hospitals to do.

I ask you again on—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. David Caplan: Nothing could be further from the truth. And the only one who is proud of the record of the previous government is the member opposite.

In fact, Linda Haslam-Stroud, president of ONA, said on February 3, “In the mid-1990s, the Conservative government likened RNs to ‘hula hoops’ and fired more than 10,000 of them, setting the stage for today’s nursing shortage.”

We need those nurses. We need them in our hospitals, in our long-term-care homes, and in our community.

I note for you, just yesterday the member’s colleague was saying we are spending too much, that we should be cutting those positions, that we’ve hired too many people within the public service of the province of Ontario. I disagree with those comments.

I think Conservative members need to have best-before dates on all of the statements they—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Minister of—Economic Development. It’s such a remote concept in this province, I have trouble with it.

Minister, in 2005—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Halton.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Minister, in 2005 I put an opposition day motion before this House calling for an immediate plan to deal with manufacturing job losses in Ontario. The resolution called for meaningful job action in hard-hit places like Hamilton, Welland, Guelph, Windsor and other Ontario manufacturing towns. The resolution passed that day in 2005, but the resolve of your government failed. Since then, we have seen nearly 300,000 manufacturing jobs lost across the province, with a large number added this week. Today, we heard about 1,200 more jobs lost in Windsor, one of those hard-hit cities the Premier and yourself promised to protect in 2005.

1040

Minister, yesterday the Premier said he was not responsible for job losses in Hamilton. You will probably say that you can’t do anything about the 1,200 workers laid off today in Windsor. If this is your stance, Minister, what is it that you can do for the hard-hit people of Ontario?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The member raised the events of yesterday in Windsor, and obviously, for the people affected who were on the third shift at Chrysler, it’s a very difficult time. It was anticipated since last August, but that doesn’t make it any easier for those workers. It was actually one of the last plants on the continent in which there were three shifts. Obviously, we’re hoping that the second shift will have enough production that some of those people will be able to continue to work.

We also, with respect to US Steel, see the impacts of the drop in auto sales.

What does a government do? Probably the best contribution that provincial and federal governments can make for the auto industry is the work we’re doing to try to create and support a viable auto industry. Probably the best thing we can do for the steel industry is to create more demand and increase supply by providing assistance to the auto industry, and that’s exactly what the provincial government is doing right now.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Boy, that’s faint hope for people in the manufacturing business in Ontario.

Minister, you have two ministers in your cabinet from Windsor. You would think they might urge you to come up with a plan to save these jobs. The minister of trade is probably too busy spending taxpayers’ dollars in fancy hotels overseas; the Minister of Finance would rather be

in Toronto creating a record budget for the province of Ontario.

Had you listened in 2005, the people at Chrysler in Windsor might still have jobs. But you frittered away the good times. You set us up for disaster with your tax-and-spend policies, and the continuing inaction is making things worse.

Minister, tell me, tell the people of Ontario and tell the people in Windsor, Hamilton, Guelph, Oshawa, Kitchener, Welland and all those other great manufacturing towns, under your leadership, is this the end of manufacturing in Ontario?

Hon. Michael Bryant: It's thanks to the members for Windsor that there's a future in Windsor and there's a future in the manufacturing industry in the province of Ontario. There is no way in the history of this province you have had two MPPs in Windsor, and all the MPPs representing Windsor from this party, who have fought for their communities harder than these MPPs you referred to.

The Minister of International Trade is travelling around the world to bring investments into all parts of this province, but you can bet she works very hard to bring investments into Windsor. The Minister of Finance, making investments in the advanced manufacturing strategy and through the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, has seen millions of dollars invested directly into companies, leveraging hundreds of millions of dollars of investments that create jobs in their communities and communities across this province. So don't tell me that we don't have the best members for Windsor, because we do.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: If the future of Ontario is based on what Windsor is doing today—it's got the highest unemployment level in Ontario—then Ontario is headed down the wrong road, if that's your answer.

Minister, you pretend to understand the severities of these issues, but your actions or inactions do not fill me with confidence. Instead of dealing with the big questions that your Premier talked about over Christmas, you've reverted to your usual routine of ignoring the economy again. Instead of actually dealing with issues like red tape, high taxes, competitiveness and productivity, your government would rather talk about young offenders housing, cosmetic surgery—worthy subjects surely, but not right now. Right now, we need a plan. Right now, we need leadership. Right now, we need some reprieve for the people of the manufacturing cities of Ontario.

Minister, will you commit today to a serious change in your economic approach? Do you realize that you can make a difference if you try?

Hon. Michael Bryant: In fact, the member talks about a plan. It's the plan that the member voted against. It's the plan that put into place investments in the advanced manufacturing sector that led to a loan commitment of \$10 million to Roxul Inc. Where's Roxul Inc? It's in Milton, to the member who asked the question. An investment and a loan commitment of \$3 million to

Procter and Gamble Inc. of where? In Brockville, in Leeds–Grenville. We also have investments in Koolatron in Brantford, for the MPP for Brant. We have investments, in Oxford and Cambridge, in Toyota Canada.

This government's economic strategy, amongst other things, involves direct investment of industry funds into businesses. It's something that that member calls "corporate welfare" and this government calls "economic investment" to allow and jump-start companies so that they can jump ahead of their competitors. We stand for that economic stimulus and you voted against it.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The leader of the third party.

Applause.

Mr. Howard Hampton: If some people believe in a diversion strategy, it won't work.

My question is for the minister who claims to be the minister for industry investment in the province. Two days ago, 2,100 jobs at Stelco in Hamilton—gone; 261 jobs at Vale Inco in Sudbury—gone; yesterday, 1,200 jobs at the Chrysler minivan plant in Windsor—gone. The common thread: While the McGuinty government has been handing out hundreds of millions of dollars to some of the world's largest corporations, the McGuinty government has been getting no investment guarantees, no job guarantees and no product guarantees. The result: While the corporations get hundreds of millions of dollars, tens of thousands of Ontario workers get the pink slip. Minister, how does the McGuinty government justify handing out hundreds of millions of dollars to global corporations while the same corporations give their Ontario workers the goodbye slip?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Yes, the member is citing companies that have announced layoffs—US Steel—very, very significant layoffs; brutal news for Nanticoke and Hamilton. As well, the news yesterday at Chrysler with respect to 1,200 people affected on the third shift, as I said. It was anticipated, but that's of cold comfort to the people of that community, some of whom we hope will be involved in the second shift.

This government has made investments in small, medium and large enterprises. In every circumstance that we do so, we do it in order to grow the economy, and we do it through a process that I know the member voted against, but it's a process that allows these companies to see those investments, leverage those investments into larger investments and expand their footprint. It has resulted in significant expansion as a result of this, and at the same time—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government says that handing out hundreds of millions of dollars to global corporations has resulted in significant expansions. About the only significant expansion we see is the expan-

sion in the number of workers who are unemployed, and that is the sad truth. This is the same old thing you've been doing now for five years: handing out the money, holding press conferences telling everyone in Ontario, "This is going to be wonderful, this is going to be fantastic," and then five months later, six months later, 1,000 workers get laid off; 2,000 workers get laid off; 3,000 workers get laid off.

When is the McGuinty government going to go back into the meeting room and say to itself, "This strategy of handing out hundreds of millions of dollars without job guarantees, investment guarantees and product guarantees isn't working"? When are you going to rethink a strategy that obviously hasn't—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I know that the member wouldn't want people to think that, in fact, the circumstances at US Steel, for example, involved the government making investments and then there being a change of circumstance. In fact, that is not the case. US Steel is a company that previously in Hamilton was Stelco. It was a company that the government, yes, intervened in to try and save the company, and saved it, thanks to the workers and, as well, some investments from the provincial government. As a result of that, pensions were saved—pensions were guaranteed. Those pensions are being paid and will continue to be paid, just as the obligations to the province will continue to be paid.

1050

The leader of the third party can't have it both ways. You can't complain when we make investments in corporations that have jobs in Ontario and then complain when we don't make investments in those same corporations, but we will continue making those investments, and we will continue growing the economy where we can grow the economy—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Well, I would say to the McGuinty government, "You can't have it both ways." We support making investments in Ontario's industries. We've been advocating for four years that the McGuinty government take a look at the forest sector and the destruction of jobs that is happening there.

But let's look at US Steel. US Steel got \$150 million. Did the McGuinty government get an investment guarantee? Did it get a job guarantee? Did it get a guarantee that US Steel would consider even other alternatives before simply laying off? No, you didn't. As a result, 2,100 workers in Hamilton are staring at unemployment now.

Again, when is the McGuinty government going to rethink its strategy instead of simply handing out money to global corporations? When are you going to demand product guarantees, job guarantees and investment guarantees so workers don't get a pink slip six months to a year later?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Well, the role of the provincial government in 2006 with Stelco was to move in and guarantee the pensions. It was to provide assistance for those people. I think you'd be hard pressed to find a single individual receiving that pension today as a result of that deal who would say that that was not in the best interests of those people and that community.

I want to assure those people that the pension obligations will continue to be paid. Certainly, I want to assure this House that the obligations to the government of Ontario will continue to be paid, and we will make sure that these legal obligations are met.

At the same time, we need—and I know the member would want to support this—management to come to the table, which they have not to date, and work with labour, work with the union and work with the workers to come up with alternatives other than simply the layoffs, including early retirement. It's something I've spoken to Leo Gerard about, and I know it's something that US Steel is going to want to get on very—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: Again to the minister: The minister talks about US Steel. It seems to me when \$150 million was handed out to US Steel, the government could have insisted, "Look, if you're facing layoffs or you're facing a declining economy, this company will consider other measures than simply laying off. This company will consider work sharing. This company will consider those kinds of measures." Those are things that you were in a position to demand of US Steel before you handed out \$150 million.

The question is, why doesn't the McGuinty government go to the table and demand these things? Why are you so happy to hand out hundreds of millions of dollars to global corporations and get nothing for Ontario workers?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The fact is that, had the government not made the intervention, nothing would have gone to those pensioners. Those pensioners would have looked at this bankrupt company and said, "There goes our pension." Instead, this government intervened to guarantee those pensions. That investment, that loan that the Ontario government made, because—and I'm happy to spend the entire question period talking about what the provincial government did to save the pensions of people in Hamilton in the dealings with Stelco in 2006. I'm happy to continue to have this question period on this front.

The investments were made to save the pensions. As a result of that, the pensions were saved. Notwithstanding the brutal news by US Steel recently, the pension money will continue to flow, and we will certainly make sure that the pensions continue to flow because that deal in 2006 was about the pensioners.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Well, we will see in due course how guaranteed pensions are. But, again, I want to return to the 2,100 workers at US Steel in Hamilton and at Lake Erie who are now out on the street—out on the street. At the same time, the corporation that's putting them out on the street got \$150 million of Ontario taxpayer money. The McGuinty government can turn all kinds of circles and somersaults trying to avoid this, but this is the reality. It has been the reality with General Motors at \$235 million; it has been the reality, sadly, with Chrysler, which got \$77 million; it has been the reality with Ford, sadly, which got \$100 million; and it's the sad reality with US Steel.

The question remains: When is the McGuinty government actually going to insist on some measures—product guarantees, job guarantees or an Ontario-first strategy? When is the McGuinty government—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The province came to the table. We insisted upon pension guarantees, and we got pension guarantees. That's what we went to the table to achieve, and that was what was achieved.

I think that the member is underestimating the productivity of those workers at US Steel. Remember, 4,000 people at US Steel plants across the United States in the last few months have seen shutdowns—some temporary, some permanent. Four thousand US Steel workers saw that happen before this bad news hit Canada. That is a testament to the productivity of those workers. That is a testament to the knowledge and skills of those workers, and it's because of that that there is certainly a lot more potential at those particular plants than a number of plants in the United States that have already faced a closure.

Again, I would urge the member to support this effort to get management and the workers together to try—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Some days, I can't believe what I'm hearing from the McGuinty government. This is a steel plant that functioned throughout the Great Depression. This is a steel plant that continued to function through the very deep recession of 1981 to 1983. This is a steel plant that continued to function through the last recession in the early 1990s.

Today, the McGuinty government is saying, "They should be thankful they were only laid off and shut down now." Again, is this the full measure of the McGuinty government jobs strategy: "Be thankful that you held on to your job a few weeks longer than someone else somewhere else"? Is this the McGuinty government jobs strategy: hand out hundreds of millions of dollars to global corporations, then watch as they lay off tens of thousands of Ontario workers? Don't you think, Minister, that Ontario workers and Ontario citizens deserve something more, something better from the McGuinty government than this?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The strategy is, in addition to providing assistance to the companies in this extra-

ordinary circumstance with respect to the auto industry, to provide direct investments into businesses. Yes, some of them are multinational businesses; no question about it. Some are homegrown businesses here in the province of Ontario. Regardless, they create wealth, they create economic activity in the province of Ontario, and they create jobs. The member is standing up and he's trying to drive this theme through that the government of Ontario should not be making investments in multinational corporations. Firstly, that's wrong. Secondly, these multinationals create jobs. I can tell you, the people who are working at US Steel want to be working at a multinational corporation right now. That's why we need to get management and labour to come to the table and look at alternatives. At the same time, the government will continue to make investments in multinationals and otherwise—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Minister of Finance: Minister, families in my area in Stoney Creek, Glanbrook and Niagara are reeling from the devastating news of 2,100 job losses at Stelco and 111 job losses at Court Valve in Beamsville, on top of the 800 John Deere losses happening this year.

It was largely from the wallets of working families and seniors like these that you raked in some \$27 billion in increased revenue over the past five years. Now as they lose their jobs, they learn that you took all of that money and blew it out the door, leaving no cushion whatsoever for when times got tough, plunging us into the deepest deficit in our province, surpassing even the fiscal ineptitude of Bob Rae.

Minister, not only is this an extraordinary failure in leadership; isn't it an extraordinary betrayal of these folks who worked hard, gave you more money and find now that you have no plan to bring jobs back to our province?

1100

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To those people who have lost their jobs in Hamilton and my home community of Windsor, we will continue to work to find solutions to the challenges they face and we certainly won't turn our backs on them at this point in time. They join workers in Michigan, Indiana, England, France, Germany and China who are losing jobs hand over fist. I don't think anybody buys for a moment that we are going to be exempt from that reality.

In fact, where we saw remarkable growth in taxes over the last few years was in corporate taxes, not personal income taxes, and that was due to rising profits. We invested that in health care and education. We paid down debt. We eliminated the previous government's deficit. That was—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Let's review, Minister, the McGuinty economic record at the five-year point. We learned that despite the \$27-billion tax windfall, you've plunged our province into the biggest deficit in our history, surpassing even Bob Rae. We have, under Dalton McGuinty, become a have-not province, and we have a have-not Premier when it comes to any ideas to get us out of it. Unlike Dalton McGuinty's outdated tax-and-spend policies that chase jobs from our province, we on this side believe that the best way out of deficit and have-not status is to grow our way out through private sector job creation. Sadly, with your WSIB tax hike, your energy rate increases and audits, and your goal to close down temp agencies that are trying to place folks in the few remaining jobs that there are, Minister, aren't your job-killing policies actually going to make Ontario's deficit worse in the coming years?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Governments around the world are accumulating very substantial deficits in the interest of stimulating employment. This crisis is not going to end shortly. There are no quick fixes, and to suggest that we will be exempt from that is, I think—I spoke to the head of the union at Chrysler yesterday, both the local as well as the national, as well as one of my neighbours who lost their job. I think they understand that this goes well beyond the kinds of pat hyperbole that the member opposite offers. We will put forward a plan, we will take that to the people, and we will continue to build a better, stronger and more prosperous Ontario for everyone.

L'ÉCONOMIE DU NORD NORTHERN ECONOMY

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines. Des résidents du nord de l'Ontario ont vu les moulins à papier et à scie à bois fermer l'un après l'autre avec des effets dévastateurs sur leur famille, les travailleurs et la communauté. Pendant ce temps-là, notre demande sous l'accès à l'information a découvert que 75 % du fonds de prospérité pour le secteur forestier et le programme de prégarantie est demeuré dans les coffres du gouvernement pendant que le nord de l'Ontario perdait des milliers de bons emplois. C'est l'industrie minière qui a alimenté l'économie du nord, mais maintenant c'est cette industrie qui perd des emplois.

J'aimerais connaître le plan du gouvernement pour l'économie du nord de l'Ontario.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you very much for the question. I appreciate it very much. Certainly we are incredibly conscious of the challenges that are facing the northern Ontario economy, particularly in the mining sector, which I'm responsible for, and the forestry sector under Minister Cansfield. I can tell you that we continue to work incredibly closely with the mining companies. The announcement earlier this week of further job losses at Vale Inco, 261 job losses, was devastating. I think it's incredibly important that we recognize that the global

financial crisis has had a great impact on the mining sector as well.

We are pleased to be able to say, though, that through work we're doing on the northern Ontario growth plan, which I'm co-chairing with my colleague, the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, we are developing an economic blueprint for the north. We had an incredibly important gathering recently, the Think North Summit, bringing northerners together, recognizing that during these challenging times it's even more important that we develop an economic plan for the north. With the growth plan, we—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The economy in northern Ontario is shrinking. According to the Sudbury Star, Sudbury alone lost 3,550 direct and indirect mining sector jobs since last fall. This government has let down forest workers, their families and northern communities by holding back 75% of the money that was supposed to support that industry through difficult times. Now, mines are laying off hundreds of workers. In my riding alone, in Nickel Belt, 1,000 people lost their jobs in the last month. There aren't that many jobs in Nickel Belt; 1,000 jobs hurts lots.

What is the plan of the Minister of Northern Development and Mines? What is the plan for the mining sector?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Again, I very much appreciate the question. We are incredibly aware, obviously, of the challenges that are being faced in the mining sector. Certainly there were extraordinary economic opportunities there in the past that are being impacted by the global financial crisis and the job losses. You illustrate the number there, and it's very, very difficult.

I can tell you, having just attended the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada convention in Toronto this past week with 18,000 delegates from all across the world, 100 jurisdictions, there is still very much a belief that, indeed, we've gone through difficult times before, the mining sector has been down, and it's going to be back up again. There's no doubt that, with the commodity prices being where they are, except for gold, those challenges are there. But there is still real optimism. I spoke to so many people who believe that indeed we're going to be back. Certainly, we're going to continue to work very, very closely with our mineral development strategy for the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines to see a prosperous future. Mining will continue—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

NURSES

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: My question this morning is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Time and time again, we hear about the shortage of nurses in this province. That's one of the reasons why in 2003 the McGuinty government pledged to hire an additional 8,000 nurses and why in the 2007 election the govern-

ment committed to adding 9,000 more nurses over the coming years.

Yet in these difficult economic times, I know that some nurses in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga and across Ontario are concerned. They want to know that their hard work is appreciated by this government. They want to know that this government will hire nurses, not fire them as previous governments have done. I ask the Minister of Health, is he truly committed to the nurses in Ontario?

Hon. David Caplan: I'm glad the honourable member asks this question. It gives me a chance to express my appreciation not only to the more than 100,000 nurses who are keeping our province's health care system strong, but to their leadership, who are here with us today in the gallery at Queen's Park. I welcome you here today.

Our hospitals, our long-term-care homes and our family health teams are thriving because of the expertise, skills, diligence and dedication of our nurses. Our government and I are absolutely committed to increasing the number of nurses working in this province. According to the most recent data from the College of Nurses of Ontario, we've hired 9,669 nurses since we were elected in 2003. That's almost 10,000 nursing jobs created in the province of Ontario.

Today, I am pleased to tell you that the College of Nurses of Ontario is reporting that there are officially more than 1,300 nurse practitioners entitled to practise in the province. According to the college, in 2003, there were 535—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: There are currently a number of hospitals in Ontario attempting to balance their budgets. Like this government and like many Ontario families, hospitals are trying to figure out how to thrive in difficult economic times. Many of them are working closely with their LHINs to find solutions that will not compromise patient care, examining ways to maximize resources and capitalize on the expertise of highly qualified health care professionals. Occasionally, this may mean that nurses have to change jobs, and some of them could end up in positions that require more training.

Can the Minister of Health tell this House what the government is doing to support nurses through this difficult economic transition? What is the government doing to ensure that nurses land on their feet?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to tell my honourable colleagues about an initiative that was created back in 2005 to help to address this specific issue. We invested in a \$40-million strategy called the nursing retention fund. In fact, it's managed by our three major nursing partners. This fund provides additional resources to help hospitals retrain and retain nurses. It helps nurses build on their skills and train for more specialized positions. It's designed to help safeguard nursing jobs when Ontario hospitals seek to reorganize, reallocate or redeploy resources.

1110

I want to encourage more Ontario hospitals to take advantage of this fund, because the applications that have

been submitted to date—I know more hospitals and nurses could benefit from the opportunities that this fund can create for them.

We want to empower Ontario hospitals to strengthen and develop their nursing staff as they reallocate their resources, and this fund is designed to do just that. I think it's a promising solution, one that will—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion.

In a recent RCMP document, lab reports showed that bagged cigarettes with unknown names, manufactured offshore, contained a lot more than tobacco. The report shows the bodies of small insects, insect larvae, insect feces, all embedded in the tobacco used to make the illegal cigarettes smoked more and more frequently by underage smokers. So not only is the rapid rise of illegal tobacco product use by underage persons being recorded while you try to sell the no-smoking message, but these kids are smoking things that have no business being sold anywhere, much less outside the law and near schools.

Is the minister aware of these horrific ingredients in what Ontario's kids are smoking, and will she commit to this Legislature and the people of Ontario that she'll start doing the job to which she was appointed?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I'll refer the question to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Certainly, the short answer to the question is yes. That's why we on this side of the House discourage anyone from buying illegal cigarettes. That's why our provincial police services and our municipal police services across the province of Ontario are actively engaged with the RCMP and with international police services to minimize that amount. And do you know what? We look forward to the continued co-operation of the RCMP, the OPP and international police services so that we can get rid of this scourge.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: To that list of ingredients, I think we can add baloney.

Recent statistics—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the honourable member to choose better words and try to maintain decorum. You saw what it did.

Mr. Peter Shurman: It was a joke; I withdraw it.

Recent statistics say that despite all of the minister's efforts, the Smoke-Free Ontario Act just isn't working. Over 50% of all tobacco sales in Ontario are now illegal. Last year when I raised this subject, it was about 40%.

Stakeholders say you're telling them that your objective is to eliminate smoking altogether, and if that's true, perhaps saying so publicly is appropriate.

You are not protecting Ontarians, especially our young people, who can purchase illicit cigarettes and other

tobaccos in strip malls, parking lots, near most schools. The plan is no plan.

Minister, will you or will you not undertake to ensure that you are doing what you say? Will the McGuinty government apply the law—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Let me tell you that it isn't baloney when you get the international—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the honourable member to listen to what the member from Thornhill just said. He withdrew the comment. Don't start it back and forth.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I withdraw, Speaker.

I think it's very, very important that the member over there, who purports to be such a champion, remember the fact that the ingredients in those cigarettes can do an individual a great deal of harm, and so it is important that he understand that the RCMP, the international police services, the Ontario Provincial Police service, every border municipal police service, every municipal police service in Ontario, take this as very, very important.

We know that 90% comes across the border. We're doing everything to ensure—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

NURSES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

The Ontario Nurses' Association is marching to Queen's Park to deliver a message to the McGuinty government. ONA was forced to launch a media campaign called Cutting Nurses, Cutting Care to try to stop the McGuinty government cuts to nursing positions and nursing hours of care, which threaten patient care. ONA has received notice of hundreds of cuts to nursing positions and expects the numbers to balloon as Ontario health care facilities grapple with balancing their budgets. The minister talks about job offers on Workopolis. My question: Is the minister denying that nurses are being laid off?

Hon. David Caplan: Under the NDP government, in fact, 3,000 nursing positions were lost. I certainly acknowledge the history of my colleague opposite. Under this government, 10,000 nursing positions have been created in the province of Ontario. The future for nurses in the province of Ontario is equally bright. We are going to continue to hire nurses. The member should be familiar that in Sudbury we began the very first nurse-practitioner-led clinic in 2007. This clinic is providing care to 2,000 patients who previously did not have access to family health care. These are the exciting opportunities that we are creating for nurses within a hospital environment, within long-term care and within the community. We will be driving out an additional 25 of these nurse-practitioner-led clinics, the next—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Maybe I should have tried my question in French because I didn't seem to get an answer. In the last election, the McGuinty government promised 9,000 more nurses, but he said that the promise would have to wait. In order to maintain good quality care with our aging population, we need a minimum of 3,000 new nurses this year. Instead, nurses are being laid off and patient care is suffering. My question again: Is the minister denying that nurses are being laid off right now?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, I will quote from the RAO Queen's Park 2009 backgrounder: "Based on College of Nurses of Ontario figures from 2004-08, government met its promise to add 8,000 nursing positions."

In fact, we are adding an additional 9,000 nurses in the province of Ontario. As we speak, there are nursing positions that are open. We are looking for nurses to be able to fill those positions anywhere on a daily basis, from 200 to 300, and sometimes even more, every single day. We need nurses. We need them in our hospitals, we need them in our long-term-care homes and we need them in our communities. Their skills and expertise are our cornerstone to better health care, to lowering wait times and to the better care that Ontarians expect.

I have extended an offer in my hand to the leadership of the Ontario Nurses' Association and the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario to work with us to be able to provide—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Reza Moridi: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Minister, everybody is talking about the need to invest in infrastructure. My constituents and I understand the significant infrastructure needs that many municipalities are facing. One of the ways that the government can help to address these pressing infrastructure needs is through investing in our health care infrastructure.

In my community of Richmond Hill, we have had the good fortune to recently see a new chronic kidney disease program open up as part of the phase one redevelopment of York Central Hospital. This investment will mean that people in my community will get treatment closer to home and will benefit from this expansion and renovation. Minister, what are you doing to improve health care infrastructure in Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: Over the course of the last several years, our government has increased approximately threefold the amount of annual investment that we've had available in the province of Ontario related to infrastructure, and health infrastructure has played a very crucial element of that. In fact, in the last five years we've constructed more new hospital facilities or ini-

tiated more construction than just about four or five governments in the province of Ontario before that added together. And the pace continues, at a very torrid one indeed.

At present, in our alternate financing model, we have more than 20 new projects that are under way in a variety of communities. I know that the local construction in Richmond Hill is being met with good acceptance. The point of the matter is, we've made a lot of progress already, but we certainly expect to continue moving forward and bringing new hospital infrastructure to communities all across the province of Ontario.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Reza Moridi: Minister, I know that there are many communities across the province that would benefit from these projects. My constituents recognize the need for these important investments in health care infrastructure. However, my municipality and others across the province are also experiencing problems with aging infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and water and waste water facilities. During times like this, we recognize that we need to do everything we can to support our local economies and invest in those projects that will create jobs and improve our quality of life.

Minister, what are you doing to improve other types of infrastructure in the province and create badly needed jobs in our communities?

Hon. George Smitherman: At present when we look at all of the infrastructure investments ongoing in the province of Ontario, we see 100,000 people in the province working to contribute substantially to its rebuilding—stimulus yes, perhaps in the short term, but transitioning our infrastructure to being able to support the strong economy of the future.

Recently, working with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, we had our communities component announcement, where the federal government, provincial government and municipalities teamed up: \$1 billion of additional funding for 289 projects across the province of Ontario.

We're looking for opportunities, working in partnership with other levels of government, to continue to make investments in the essential infrastructure: water, waste water and roads. In the member's very own riding in Richmond Hill: \$5.8 million through Investing in Ontario, \$2.25 million in the Pioneer Park stormwater management project and \$1.9 million for local roads and bridges.

PESTICIDES

Mr. Frank Klees: To the Minister of the Environment: At a time when Ontario needs a plan for business, this minister is knowingly and intentionally shutting down businesses and shutting down jobs across the province. In fact, with his publication of 250 pesticides banned yesterday, he has essentially knowingly created serious difficulties for businesses across the province. In

fact, his colleague the member for Oak Ridges—Markham agrees, and agrees with the industry that many of the pesticides that are on this list should not be there. She wrote him a letter dated February 20 in which she asked him to revisit this issue. I'd like to know from the minister, has he read Dr. Jaczek's letter of February 20, and why did he not take her advice on this important issue?

Hon. John Gerretsen: It's unfortunate that this member and the vast majority of his caucus did not support this bill, which is doing something very necessary for our children who play in our front yards, our backyards and schoolyards. What we are doing is we are taking away unnecessary risks that children should not be exposed to.

I would prefer that he would align himself with the words of Dr. David Suzuki, who said, "We congratulate the Ontario government for raising the bar on protecting people and the environment from needless pesticide exposure." I would prefer that he would take the position as taken by the Canadian Cancer Society, which said that they congratulate the Ontario government "for passing strong regulations supporting the Cosmetic Pesticide Ban Act."

I would prefer that he would take the position that the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario are taking when they say—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: No one in this House opposes banning pesticides that are harmful—no one—but I will align myself with the words of Dr. Helena Jaczek, a Liberal member of this Legislature who is a former medical officer of health for York region. I'll read the letter, which obviously the minister has not read. She says, referring to only one of those, "Imidacloprid would be affected by the ban.... Health Canada concluded that the human health and environmental risks" associated with its use are acceptable. She goes on to say: "This suggests that the current view of [it's] health implications by the provincial government is worthy of reconsideration." She goes on in the letter and encourages the minister to take a scientific approach to this issue.

Why will he not listen to the former medical officer of health, his colleague sitting across the floor? Why will he not—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. John Gerretsen: We did exactly that: We took a very scientific approach with respect to all of the products that we have banned. What Health Canada basically says about any of the individual products is that it's an acceptable risk. We believe that it's much better to take a precautionary approach and not allow any of our children to be subjected to unnecessary risks. There also haven't been enough studies done to look at the cumulative effects that all of these pesticides have on the human body, particularly on young people.

This is the right way to go. The people of Ontario agree with us, and I would only hope that the members of that caucus would agree with us as well to deal with this

unnecessary risk that our children should simply not be exposed to.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just remind the honourable member that we have a practice in this chamber of not dealing with points of order during question period.

The honourable member from Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. A recent report by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada painted a bleak picture on affordable housing in this province. One in five tenant households spent more than 50% of their income on rent. The affordable housing waiting list is now at a shocking 124,000 households. In 2003, the McGuinty Liberals promised 20,000 new units of affordable housing. One election and six years later, less than 10,000 units are occupied, with another 3,000 in the planning process. Why won't this minister finally take responsibility for this government's lack of contribution to our housing stock?

Hon. Jim Watson: One of the last times the honourable member asked the question, she referred to the \$100-million investment that this government put into repairing housing as "meagre." I don't know about you, but on this side of the House, \$100 million, which was the single largest investment in housing repair in the history of Ontario, is extremely significant, and it's helping individuals and helping improve their lives.

Just this last month—340 units were occupied in December 2008 and in 2009, including 31 units at Vaughan Road in Toronto; 11 units at the youth and family resource centre in Windsor; 12 units at the Melco-Campbell in Windsor; 213 home ownership units and 64 northern units. We have invested \$734 million in a joint program with the federal government. We're proud of that investment and we're proud of the fact that this government pressured the federal government into getting back into the affordable housing—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The Liberals love history.

Despite the fact that we got no federal help, during the NDP government we built 70,000 new affordable housing units. The report suggests the recession will make this crisis even worse. In 2007, more rental units were lost to demolition than were created. Now is the time to build affordable housing. The NDP's stimulus plan calls for an additional 7,500 units this year alone to meet the desperate need and to create jobs. There's a 21-year waiting list for affordable housing in Peel region. Is that how long it's going to take for the McGuinty government

to take housing seriously and make a waiting-list-busting investment, finally?

Hon. Jim Watson: On the eve of the NDP leadership, let me quote one of the delegates who appeared on November 15 in Sudbury at the all-candidates' leadership questions. She said, "I'm going to preface my question by saying that the mailings I've received from the Ontario NDP ... have, more often than not, not mentioned housing and homelessness." Where is the NDP on housing and homelessness? They talk an awful lot about it. This government acts. We brought in the rent bank, which so far has prevented 16,000 evictions in the province of Ontario. We also brought in the lowest rental increase in Ontario history. Every single time we've brought a progressive measure to help in the battle against homelessness and to create more affordable housing, the NDP talk a good tale but they vote—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, specifically about the repair of social housing here in Ontario.

A year ago in the budget, our government committed \$100 million to social housing repair. The city of Toronto received \$36 million. The NDP member for Parkdale has called this investment of \$100 million a meagre investment; \$100 million is no meagre amount of money. Certainly, that investment in Toronto and in other communities across Ontario has made an impact on repairing social housing.

Minister, what's the status of this investment in the repair of social housing in Ontario?

1130

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me begin by thanking the honourable member, a former chair of community housing in the city of Toronto, who did excellent work before he got here to the Legislature and who continues to be a great advocate for those individuals seeking affordable housing, not just in his own riding of Willowdale but throughout the city of Toronto.

When the province announced funding for repairs and renovations, a total of \$36 million went to the city of Toronto. When the NDP, in their last platform, talked about money to Toronto, they wanted to invest just \$30 million. We've already increased, by their base level—\$36 million.

These investments have reduced the backlog for capital repairs in Toronto significantly from \$300 million to \$200 million. I congratulate the city of Toronto for using funds—\$75 million from the sale of Toronto Hydro Telecom—to put into affordable housing. That's the kind of partnership we're very proud to be part of.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: Minister, in these very tough economic times, the need for affordable housing is even more urgent, more critical. In Toronto and throughout the

GTA, I hear many stories about families struggling with the cost of rental housing. These families are struggling with difficult decisions, often ones beyond their control. They're hard-working families trying to provide the best for their children, a good education for their children, a safe, clean place to live and, indeed, hope for the family. Sometimes, through no fault of their own, it's difficult or impossible to make ends meet.

Minister, what are we doing to help these Ontarians in need of housing?

Hon. Jim Watson: The NDP may laugh at these kinds of questions because, quite frankly, they're embarrassed by their own track record. Even their own members are criticizing the NDP for not doing more than simply just talking about helping those individuals. Well, we've done more than talk; we've acted.

The rent increase guideline for 2009 is 1.8%. We have had the pleasure of bringing in rent control that makes sense and is affordable, tied to the consumer price index. It's simple and transparent for the public to understand.

Rent bank assistance in the city of Toronto, for instance: \$5 million invested province-wide in 2008; Toronto received \$1.8 million of that. As a result of the money we put in the rent bank just in the city of Toronto, in the member's community, 3,261 individuals have staved off eviction, which is something we're very proud of.

The ROOF—rental opportunities for Ontario families—program: a \$100-a-month subsidy, \$185 million, 21,000—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services. Minister, small businesses in Ontario are being hit by the double whammy of a global economic meltdown and the McGuinty government that burdens them with an unforgiving load of regulations. Every bill you introduce makes it harder to stay in business in this province.

Your new temporary help agencies bill, Bill 139, is a good example. It's going to create higher costs for business, and it's going to create more red tape for workers. Just at the time when our economy is struggling, we need those businesses; we need those workers.

I ask the minister, haven't you throttled small business enough with your red tape? How can you support this bill when you know it will only hurt small business, not help it?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to thank the member for asking the question. I'm very much aware of the contribution that the small businesses make to our province. They are about 360,000 in total. They contribute about \$250 billion, and our government has been working very, very closely with them to make sure that some of the challenges they are facing in the global economy right now get addressed.

I want to talk about one special program that we have introduced so that we can help the small businesses more. These are peer-to-peer round tables that are conducted by Direct Engagement. I participate on a monthly basis in this program in the very first week of the month. What this does is—basically this is a webcast program where people can actually sign up on the webcast, and the people can actually participate—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

POINTS OF ORDER

Mr. Frank Klees: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to make my point of order, but I would also like you to clarify, if you could, for me and other members the issue of raising a point of order. I was under the impression that the standing orders provide for any member at any time to be able to raise a point of order, realizing that it's up to you to decide whether it is a point of order. But to rule it out before the member has the opportunity to make the point, I find of interest, and perhaps you could clarify why that would be the case.

I would like to speak to my point of order, and it relates to the Minister of the Environment's response to my question. He made the statement that every member of this caucus voted against the act, which is not true. It was a recorded vote. I would ask that you give the member an opportunity to withdraw that statement.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable member for his point of order. I cannot compel a member to withdraw a comment that he may or may not wish to make.

On the issue, I think if you were to look back under a number of Speakers from all parties who have sat in this chair, the convention within this chamber is that we want to ensure a good flow through question period. I would encourage you—and I'd certainly be happy, in consultation with the clerks' table, to provide you rulings from a number of Speakers who have stood behind the no points of order during question period.

If it's an issue that he chooses to pursue, I would encourage him to take it up with his House leader. Perhaps it's an issue that House leaders may want to discuss, but it has been standard practice in here not to recognize points of order during question period.

Hon. John Gerretsen: If I did say that all of the members of the Tory caucus voted against it, I was incorrect. Certainly the vast majority did. There may have been—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Further to the point of order made by Mr. Klees and your comments on it, you might also then, sir, want to counsel the members of this Legislature about frivolous points of order that are used from time to time to interrupt the 20 minutes of an opposition member's participation in the debate in an effort to simply consume time. They're almost inevitably made at the 18th minute to deny that person—and I've witnessed

it in this chamber over the last couple of weeks, several times by one particular member.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

Mr. Norm Miller: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I wanted to advise that I'm unhappy with the answer I received from the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services and will be filing a late show.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I encourage the member to send that to the table. I think for any member, whenever they're dissatisfied with an answer during question period, that's the practice to follow.

DEPUTY CLERK'S ANNIVERSARY

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just ask all members to join me in congratulating Todd Decker on his 25th anniversary of employment at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Congratulations.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1138 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Frank Klees: Last evening, I met with residents, family members and staff of the Southlake Residential Care Village in Newmarket and heard first-hand of the serious effects the McGuinty government's underfunding of long-term-care homes is having on the quality of care and safety of their residents. Staff also described how impossible it is to provide a reasonable level of care at the current staffing levels and how staff reductions in housekeeping and kitchen services have resulted in the downloading of additional workload onto personal support workers. I heard how, on some shifts, one personal support worker is expected to look after 32 residents—an impossible task.

Dawn Khoury, who is the only social worker at Southlake Village and cares for 192 residents, presented me with these 446 cards signed by residents, their families, friends and staff, with a request that I bring their concerns to the attention of the Premier and the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, and I'm doing that now by way of this statement.

I'm calling on the Premier to ensure that he and his cabinet prioritize the needs of long-term-care residents in our province and, as the card states, "correct the six-year erosion in funding for housekeeping, maintenance and other services that support resident care, comfort and safety," and "fully implement the already promised 2,500 extra personal support workers and 2,000 nurses."

There can be no greater priority than ensuring our seniors' safety and comfort through the quality care they deserve. It's up to the Premier to do that.

RICHMOND HILL CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Mr. Reza Moridi: This past Saturday, I had the pleasure of attending the opening of the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts, together with the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, the Honourable David Onley, as well as Mayor David Barrow and hundreds of guests.

More than 20 years of hard work have gone into making this dream a reality. The centre is in the heart of Richmond Hill and features a 631-seat auditorium, a multi-purpose rehearsal hall, gallery space for visual arts and an outdoor plaza. The centre will also be able to hold film exhibits. The heritage building beside the centre was formerly the Richmond Hill High School and has been restored and included as part of the project; it now houses the centre's administration offices.

The mayor and the councillors of Richmond Hill are to be commended for their vision of the centre and the importance that this project will have to the economic revival of downtown Richmond Hill. On a personal note, I would like to congratulate Michael Grit, the theatre manager, for his tireless efforts in bringing this significant project to completion. The centre will be a place for all ages and cultures to join the celebration of the arts.

YORK SUBWAY EXTENSION

Mr. Peter Shurman: I rise today to ensure that the government of Ontario, in delivering its 2009-10 budget, includes meaningful funding for the extension of the Yonge subway line into York region, a project that has been identified as a top priority by Metrolinx and has the support of York region council, municipal councils throughout the region and the Toronto city council. It is time that the McGuinty government got on board as well and committed adequate funding to support this very important investment in Thornhill and beyond.

The proposed 6.8-kilometre Yonge line extension would add six new stations and benefit hundreds of thousands of people living in Thornhill and the surrounding communities, including ridings of Richmond Hill, Newmarket-Aurora, Vaughan, Markham-Unionville and Willowdale, just to name a few.

This project is not only about the movement of traffic but about the movement of people and the enhancement of their quality of life. The extension would stimulate the economy, create new jobs and encourage use of public transit, thereby alleviating the impact of smog and car pollution on our environment and our health in the entire GTA.

Today, I am asking the McGuinty government to break its track record of irresponsible spending and to end its streak of misguided investments. I am asking that the McGuinty government recognize York region's enormous economic potential by investing in its people and in the infrastructure that is so necessary for our future success.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I rise today in honour of International Women's Day and, in fact, International Women's Week and the fact that this has been a proud protest tradition for decades now.

What we, in the New Democratic Party, ask this government to acknowledge in their 2009 budget is the fact that women's programs need funding. They need core funding, and they need sustained funding. We need funding for transition housing. We need funding for child care. Certainly, without adequate child care, one of the core demands of the women's movement, there can be no equality for women, and we don't have adequate child care in this province. We don't have adequate child care the way they do in Quebec, where you can get child care for \$7 a day. We need that here in Ontario, if they're serious about the women's movement and celebrating International Women's Day.

We also need them to fund the equity process, with women making 71 cents on the dollar.

Finally, we need them to fund nursing. Nursing is still a predominantly women's profession. Nurses are demonstrating outside as we speak. Nurses are being cut across the board across Ontario, despite assurances and promises to the contrary. Despite assurances and promises to hire new nurses, what we're actually doing in Ontario is cutting nurses who are already there.

If the McGuinty government is serious about women's equality, the McGuinty government will act on all these issues.

MATTHEWS MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Michael A. Brown: St. Joseph Island lies down the St. Mary's River from Lake Superior. It is a beautiful place, inhabited by strong, independent folks.

As with all islands, there's a special society that thrives there. During the 1930s, Canada's first publicly funded universal health care system was put in place on the island. The Liberal member of the Legislature at the time, Lynn Miller, had a bill passed to permit this universal, township-sponsored plan.

Today, the islanders and their mainland neighbours are faced with a consultant's recommendation to the Sault Area Hospital board to close their hospital, Matthews Memorial Hospital, which is more than 60 kilometres from the Sault hospitals.

I was one of 400 people gathered this week to clearly indicate that the closure of Matthews Memorial Hospital was unacceptable to the residents of central Algoma. Their message is crystal clear.

The residents of St. Joseph Island and central Algoma have been strong supporters of health care in the area, including in Sault Ste. Marie. Many have been generous in their support, not only for their local hospital but also for the capital program for the new Sault Ste. Marie hospital.

It is time that the Sault Area Hospital board dismiss this ill-founded recommendation now. The Sault Area Hospital board needs to focus their attention on the real problem and keep their hands off Matthews Memorial and Thessalon hospitals.

SKILLED TRADES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: It is an honour today to stand in this House and congratulate my colleague Garfield Dunlop, MPP for Simcoe North. Today, Mr. Dunlop will be recognized for his very significant contribution in the area of skilled trades, when he receives the prestigious Klaus Woerner Skilled Trades Hall of Fame Award.

Mr. Dunlop will be the first politician to receive this prestigious award. It is his extensive background in skilled trades that has set the foundation for his passionate advocacy for the skilled trades.

Mr. Dunlop is one of the few MPPs in this Legislature who has a background in that area. As many of us know, he is a licensed plumber and operated his family's plumbing business, Dunlop Plumbing and Heating, for almost two decades before entering politics.

In 2002, he was the author of a Ministry of Education report on apprenticeship, elements of which have been reflected in both our government's budget and the Liberal government's budget.

Mr. Dunlop was nominated by Brian Tamblyn, president and CEO of Georgian College, where Mr. Dunlop has played a vital role in establishing a skilled trades centre on their Midland campus.

We on this side of the House, and I know all of my colleagues on all sides of the House, are very proud of Garfield's accomplishments and his continued leadership in the advancement of skilled trades and apprenticeships, and we congratulate him today.

1310

NURSES

Mr. Charles Sousa: I rise today to remind this House of the outstanding job that Ontario nurses do on a daily basis and to recognize their role in ensuring a high standard of care for all Ontarians. Nurses provide a variety of functions far beyond the hospital bed, and the McGuinty government is committed to standing beside Ontario's nurses.

After eight years of drastic cuts to nursing levels, the McGuinty Liberals have taken prudent action to ensure that nurses have the resources needed to deliver the level of care Ontarians deserve. We've hired 8,000 new nurses since 2003 and ensured that 76% of recent graduates obtain full-time employment. We have provided funding for 1,200 registered practical nurse positions in our long-term-care homes, ensuring at least one new nurse in every home, and provided funding for 500 nurses in a new OMA agreement, making it easier for doctors and nurses to work together in family practice.

These investments underscore this government's commitment to our health care system and its workers. Nurses do incredible work in all aspects of care and should be rightly commended for their dedication to improving the health of all Ontarians. So, on behalf of this House, I wish to say thank you to all Ontario nurses.

JAMES PAGE MACKEY

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I rise in the House today to pay tribute to one of Toronto's finest, the late Chief of Police James Page Mackey. James Page Mackey was born on May 27, 1913, in Scarborough, Ontario, and died February 27, 2009, in Bracebridge, Ontario, at age 95. He served as chief of police from 1958 to 1970, making him the longest-serving chief in the force's history. After graduating from high school in Scarborough, the young Mackey wanted to be a chemist or a builder like his father, but the challenges of the Depression prohibited his choices.

James Mackey, then a milkman, finally joined the Toronto city police in 1936 with the encouragement of then-sergeant Michael Byrt. He was the 20th of 20 men recruited for the force at that time. This remarkable Scarborough native jumped ranks and became the chief of police of 2,300 officers and civilians of the Toronto police force. He was hailed as a man of the future when appointed chief of police in 1958. By all accounts, Chief Mackey was successful in keeping the Buffalo mobsters out of Toronto. He was dubbed an honest cop by those who upheld the law and feared by those who didn't.

Chief Mackey continued serving the public following his retirement by becoming the chair of the Liquor Licence Board of Ontario, a trustee and later chair of Muskoka's school board.

On behalf of all members of this House, the city of Toronto and particularly the residents of Scarborough, we say, "Thank you, Chief Mackey, for your service to this great city of Toronto." We also extend our profound condolences to his family and friends on his passing.

JOE TORCHETTI

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to rise in the House today to talk about a great Canadian who has been lost, and he is Joe Torchetti. Joe Torchetti was the founder and president of Lady York Foods in my riding. Lady York Foods is a real iconic supermarket that is known to people all over the city of Toronto. It was founded by Mr. Torchetti basically through his blood, sweat and tears.

He came to Canada as an immigrant and never took one day off in his whole life. He got up every morning at 5 o'clock to go down to the Ontario Food Terminal to ensure that he could choose the best and freshest of products for his customers, and he never complained—a most positive and inspirational entrepreneur, family man, father, husband and a great supporter of the Earls court Rotary Club, a great supporter of the city of Toronto and all its newcomers, and an employer beyond repute. We

have lost a great citizen, a great entrepreneur, a great Canadian—Joe Torchetti—and we shall never forget his contribution to the city and this province.

PROVINCIAL PURCHASING POLICY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: You'll be aware there are refreshments for the members in the east and west galleries. There are also apples there. In a great apple-growing province such as the province of Ontario, I wonder why those apples can't be from the province of Ontario as opposed to the country of Chile.

Could you look into that, Mr. Speaker, and please try to support the Ontario apple growers and the wonderful products that they produce in this province?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable member, and to my staff, who I'm sure are watching right now and listening, that shall be attended to quickly, because I am with you. There's nothing better. If you're going to buy an apple, the best one is the honeycrisp.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: They're grown in Elgin county.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): They're grown in Elgin county.

MOTIONS

REPORT, INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

Hon. Brad Duguid: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding a report of the Integrity Commissioner.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I move that the Legislative Assembly accept the report of the Integrity Commissioner dated December 11, 2008, and approve the recommendation contained therein.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Report adopted.

PETITIONS

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontarians are angry over the volatility of the MPAC tax assessment system, the near impossibility to predict one's assessment or to understand how it is arrived at, the patent unfairness of assessments and that the current system leaves many homeowners worried they may be forced to sell their homes; and

"Whereas changes are needed that will make Ontario's property tax system stable, understandable, fair, and sensitive to homeowners; and

"Whereas property assessments in Parkdale-High Park have risen between 28% and 45% between 2005 and 2008;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: Support the 'freeze till sale' plan to bring fairness to Ontario's property tax system so that new assessments happen only at the time of sale and when a building permit is obtained for renovations totalling more than \$40,000."

I certainly agree with this, will affix my signature and give it to Jacob to deliver.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario sent to me by Tamarack Swine Genetics in the great riding of Elgin. Their address is in Port Stanley. The petition reads as follows:

"Whereas the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Honourable Leona Dombrowsky, has publicly stated that she 'absolutely' wants to help the beginning and new entrants to agriculture; and

"Whereas beginning and expanding farmers are going to be important in the coming decade, as a record number of producers are expected to leave the industry; and

"Whereas the safety net payments—i.e., Ontario cattle, hog and horticulture payments (OCHHP)—are based on historical averages, and many beginning and expanding farmers were not in business or just starting up in the period so named and thus do not have reflective historic allowable net sales; and

"Whereas beginning and expanding producers are likely at the greatest risk of being financially disadvantaged by poor market conditions and being forced to exit agriculture because there is not a satisfactory safety net program or payment that meets their needs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To immediately adjust the safety net payments made via the OCHHP to include beginning and expanding farmers, and make a relief payment to the beginning and expanding farmers who have been missed or received seriously disproportionate payments, thereby preventing beginning farmers from exiting the agriculture sector."

I thank you for the privilege of presenting this petition and I affix my signature as I agree with the petition.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition from various citizens in the city of Toronto.

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I support this petition and I affix my name to it.

1320

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Mike Colle: I have another petition about gun crime.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas too many innocent people are being victimized by acts of violence while using public transit; and

"Whereas too many public transit employees are being victimized by acts of violence while working to serve the public; and

"Whereas we need to send a strong message of zero tolerance for violence on public transit; and

"Whereas anyone harming or carrying a weapon on public transit should be dealt with by the full force of the law; and

"Whereas public transit riders and workers have the right to ride and work on public transit, free of violence, intimidation and harm;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to put an end to violence on public transit and ... support" Bill 151 "to crack down on violence on public transit."

I support this petition and I affix my name to it.

MOTORCYCLE SAFETY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas to impose a total ban on an activity or sport under the guise of protecting the public from injury as presented by MPP Helena Jaczek in Bill 117 to amend the Highway Traffic Act, section 38.1, 'No person shall drive or operate a motorcycle on a highway if another person under the age of 14 years is a passenger on the motorcycle,' would be an injustice to us, the people of Ontario; and

"Whereas the restrictive aspects of this proposal far outweigh the minor risks associated and confirmed by the annual Ministry of Transportation statistical safety reports, and further, there is no clear distinction that 'motorcycle-related injuries' apply to Ontario streets or highways, as stated in defence of Bill 117;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Request that Bill 117 be rejected and not become law."

MOTORCYCLE SAFETY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I have a petition from some people in Kingston. It says,

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Bill 117, presented by MPP Helena Jaczek on October 27, 2008, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the driving and operation of motorcycles with child passengers, says,

"The Highway Traffic Act is amended by adding the following section:

"Prohibition of passengers under 14 years old on motorcycles

"38.1 No person shall drive or operate a motorcycle on a highway if another person under the age of 14 years is a passenger on the motorcycle";

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That Bill 117 be removed from the agenda and never become law."

PROTECTION OF MINORS

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there is no law in Ontario prohibiting pornography and other sexually explicit material from being viewed on computers in public schools and libraries; and

"Whereas there are public schools and public libraries that do not use Internet filtering software on computers that blocks such inappropriate material; and

"Whereas parents in the province of Ontario have the right to ensure their children are protected from pornography and other inappropriate material available on the Internet in their public schools and libraries;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: That all public schools and libraries in Ontario be required to install Internet filtering software on computers to avoid screening of sites with inappropriate, explicit sexual content."

I agree with this petition and I'm glad to sign my name to it and pass it to page Jacob.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to introduce this petition. I want to thank Mr. Alexander for bringing it to my attention. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents, as requested in Bill 33....

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and" their "grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

I am pleased to sign my signature in support of this petition.

BATHURST HEIGHTS ADULT LEARNING CENTRE

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition from Walter Faion and the good folks at the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are over 2,000 adult ESL students being served by the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre, operated by the Toronto District School Board, in partnership with the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas this is the only ... ESL learning centre in" the area, located right on the subway; and

"Whereas newcomers" to "Toronto, and in the Lawrence Heights area, need the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre so they can succeed in their career opportunities; and

"Whereas the proposed revitalization of Lawrence Heights threatens the existence of the centre;

"Therefore we, the undersigned," request "that any revitalization of Lawrence Heights include a newcomer centre and ensure that the Bathurst Heights centre continues to exist in the present location."

I support Walter Faion and the good people of Bathurst Heights, and I affix my name to this petition.

PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY FRANCHISE

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment has the highest average ticket revenue per game in the National Hockey League; and

"Whereas the Toronto Maple Leafs are ranked the most financially valuable team in the NHL; and

“Whereas many Hamilton and greater Toronto area hockey fans are unable to attend professional hockey games due to a lack of adequate ticket supply; and

“Whereas the Hamilton and greater Toronto area boast the biggest and best market in the world for hockey fans, with Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment bringing approximately \$2.4 billion to the local economy over 10 years; and

“Whereas a new franchise in the Hamilton and greater Toronto area is valued at \$600 million by some economists; and

“Whereas competition in both business and sports is healthy for both the Hamilton and greater Toronto area economy and sports team performance; and

“Whereas despite having the most loyal fans in the world, the Toronto Maple Leafs have not won the Stanley Cup in over 40 years; and

“Whereas Hamilton and greater Toronto area fans deserve competitive professional hockey teams;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To request that the government of the province of Ontario express its strong support to the board of governors of the National Hockey League for the relocation or expansion of a second NHL hockey team in the Hamilton and greater Toronto area in order to realize the economic advantages to the taxpayers of the province of Ontario and”—finally, Speaker—“to provide healthy competition to the existing Toronto NHL franchise.”

I obviously agree with this and will be affixing my name.

LUPUS

Mr. Kim Craiton: I'm pleased to introduce this petition on behalf of the Lupus Foundation of Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

“Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

“Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

“We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario.”

I'm extremely proud to sign my signature in support of this petition.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There appearing to be no further petitions, orders of the day.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT (PUPILS WITH DIABETES), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION (ÉLÈVES DIABÉTIQUES)

Mr. Martiniuk moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 137, An Act to amend the Education Act to allow pupils with diabetes in schools to receive certain monitoring and treatment/ Projet de loi 137, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation pour permettre aux élèves diabétiques dans les écoles de recevoir un suivi et un traitement.

1330

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: It is with great pleasure that I introduce today the second reading of Bill 137. I dedicate this bill to the Bordman family of Cambridge and to all of the dedicated families across our province who are meeting the challenge of type 1 diabetes.

Long gone are the school nurses many of us recall with fondness. I was not aware of the lack of support for elementary school children with diabetes until Terry Bordman shared with me his experiences as the father of six-year-old twin girls, Jade and Brooke, who suffer from diabetes. Both Terry and his wife, Beata, work outside the home, and their oldest daughter, Fallon, assists with the twins wherever possible. So imagine their stress and frustration to learn upon registering their young children for school that there would be nobody available to assist their children in school to manage their diabetes, either in blood sugar testing or insulin shots.

With your indulgence, I'd like to introduce the Bordmans, who are in the east gallery: the twins, Fallon, and Mr. and Mrs. Bordman.

The sole purpose of this bill is the health and well-being of our young children who suffer from type 1 diabetes and require care during each and every school day, as they are too young to assist themselves. Currently, many of the parents and caregivers of diabetic children must visit their child's school several times a day to test their child's blood sugar levels. Imagine, if you will, the stress this places on working parents, who must make arrangements to be absent from work several times a day, five days of the week. I expect there are

many families who sacrifice a second income in order to provide for their diabetic child.

Many diabetic children in our elementary schools are just too young to care for themselves. They cannot monitor their own blood sugar levels, and they are often unable to recognize when medication is required. These young children deserve our help, and if school staff presently attempts to assist the children they are probably not protected from lawsuits or school board rules and regulations. It is our duty to protect these young children of our province, and they presently receive no protection.

Let me share with you some facts about diabetes. More than 200,000 Canadians have type 1 diabetes. Canada has the sixth-highest occurrence rate of type 1 diabetes in children 14 years old and younger. The type 1 diabetes occurrence rate is rising by 3% to 5% per year. The greatest rise occurs in five- to nine-year-olds. The number of children under the age of two with type 1 diabetes has tripled in the past few years. Children with high or low blood sugar suffer from diminished capacity not only to learn but to concentrate as well.

Last year, the Ministry of Health for this province predicted that 1.2 million people in Ontario would have diabetes by 2010, more than double the figure from the year 2000. In September 2008, the Canadian Diabetes Association called on the provincial governments to enact legislation that would require all publicly funded schools to accommodate and protect students with diabetes, severe allergies, epilepsy or asthma while attending classes or any school activities. With the exception of New Brunswick, there are currently no provincial or territorial policies, regulations or legislation requiring schools to accommodate and protect students with diabetes or other life-threatening illnesses, except, of course, Ontario's own Sabrina's Law.

Following first reading of this bill last December, I was contacted by a parent from Thornhill, Mr. Brian Hook. He wrote as follows: "As a parent of a six-year-old boy with type 1 diabetes in Ontario, I want to say thank you on behalf of my entire family for your efforts. We have been fighting a continual battle with the school system for the past three years to provide a safe environment at school so that my son can receive the same education as every other six-year-old in the province. I'm sure you've heard many stories similar to mine; I know I have."

"Apparently following ambiguous board policies and collective agreements is more important than the health and safety of children. It's become so ridiculous that the York region school board is telling us that the policy ... that staff cannot give medication by ... injection means that they can't help my son with his blood glucose monitoring. I'm not quite sure how performing a blood test is injecting medication. What I find really disheartening is that a law must be created in order for people to help children with life-threatening conditions."

"Regardless, I understand that it is a long and difficult road for private members' bills to see the light of day.... As I've said to just about everyone I've contacted about

my son's diabetic care, it took a tragic incident to light the fires to create Sabrina's Law. I don't want the next law named after my son or anyone else's child because preventative action wasn't taken soon enough."

Allow me to discuss the particulars of the bill. This bill recognizes the problem and amends the Education Act, authorizing the training of staff members in our schools to provide for the monitoring and treatment of diabetic pupils. Those trained staff members are authorized to provide monitoring and treatment to any pupil who has or may have diabetes if they have reason to believe that that pupil is suffering a medical emergency.

Any parent or guardian who enrolls a diabetic pupil in an elementary school must provide the school with a notice stating that the pupil has or may have diabetes and setting out the details of the monitoring and treatment that a duly qualified medical practitioner has prescribed for the pupil. Those trained staff members are required to provide the monitoring and treatment described in the notice if the pupil or his or her guardian or parent, as applicable, consents to the monitoring and treatment.

To the extent that it is reasonably feasible, a pupil has the primary responsibility to provide the medication that the pupil needs and to administer it himself.

There are included provisions to provide protection from liability for such staff members who so act in good faith.

Just as Sabrina's Law requires treatment of children who suffer from life-threatening allergies, my bill protects the health of children who suffer from the effects of diabetes and assists them in emergencies. I would prefer, as I believe most people would, to have nurses stationed in each school, as in the past in Ontario. Unfortunately, in the present time that solution is probably not economically feasible, and the problem to be corrected is immediate and requires a practical solution now, which I believe Bill 137 is. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I will be supporting the bill—to refer this particular bill to committee for debate because it raises questions that I believe we as MPPs need to deal with.

The member talked about the fact that diabetes is the seventh-leading cause of death in Canada. That's serious. Four out of five people with diabetes die of heart disease. We've debated this issue now and then in this Legislature and talked about the seriousness of this problem. The government often talks about all of the money they spend treating this particular issue. I don't want to enumerate all the millions of dollars; I'm sure the Liberals will do that. They spend close to \$1 billion on the issue of diabetes. I don't know who's going to be speaking to it, but every Liberal will talk about the great things they've done; I understand that. But out of the \$1 billion that they spend, only 1% is given for prevention. The Liberals will mention prevention, possibly—I'm not quite sure; we'll see—but they spend only 1% of those dollars on prevention.

Diabetes is something that we can solve. There are preventable things we could do. The main factors around diabetes are obesity, lack of physical activity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol. These things we can change. There are things we cannot change. Body shape, age, family history, ethnic background: Those we can't change. But what we can change, we should be dealing with on a regular basis, and I don't believe that we, as legislators, or this government in particular, are doing this.

1340

There was a time when we had nurses in the school system who dealt with problems in the schools. We don't have nurses anymore. There was a time when we had physical education teachers to get young people to actually do physical activity in an intelligent way. It wasn't just, "Okay, kids, jump up and down." The Liberals might tell you, "Yes, we've got this going in the school system. We've got kids jumping up and down around the classroom for 20 minutes. You know how big the classroom is; we really get them to run around a whole lot in the classroom." Please. We need physical education teachers.

Only 37% of our schools in this province have physical education teachers. That should tell you and the public and those listening that we need more physical education teachers. They are trained, and they would train young people how to stay fit and healthy. If we had nurses, as we did a long time ago, they would be able to take care of the health concerns of our students rather than shifting that responsibility to the staff, meaning, I believe, teachers. That's what I think the bill refers to. When he refers to "staff," I assume he's talking about teachers.

How much, in the last 20 years, have we shifted responsibilities to the individual teacher? The teacher no longer teaches but has to do so much more. The teacher has to be a policeman or policewoman, a psychologist, a social worker, a mother or father, a disciplinarian—but not too much, because if you're too much of a disciplinarian, the parents will come down heavy on your disciplinarian activities. They're expected to do so much. I don't know if people are noticing it—I'm not sure politicians are noticing it—but parents sure ought to be noticing that we have shifted much of the responsibility of every social problem, including health-related problems, onto the back of the school system.

We used to have home economics classes, where young men and women could learn about healthy eating, healthy diets and what is good to eat, and how to cook. How bad could that have been? They're gone. Good old Mike Harris got rid of most of them, and the Liberals, of course, just kept going with the deletion of these kinds of programs.

All the things we could do and could have done are gone. Nurses, physical education teachers and home economics are gone, literally. The things that matter, in terms of what we could do, we're not doing. So we spend more and more money dealing with the problem—treat-

ing the problem—rather than preventing it. I'm just hoping that some Liberal doctors are going to stand up here and speak to this particular issue, because they have a better handle on this. I'm just going to see whether or not some good old doctor is going to stand up and say, "Yes, Marchese is right. We've got to do more of this."

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I don't think they'll agree with you.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I don't know. We'll see. It's really hard to say.

That's what we should be doing, in my view. We should be spending most of the dollars that go into diabetes on educating the public, making sure that young people are physically active, and that the young, middle-aged and seniors are eating properly as a way of preventing physical problems from happening. We're not doing that as a government. In fact, we're not doing that and many other things as a government in terms of how we keep individuals, families and young people safe. We're not. We've lost touch with these things. But we spend billions of dollars treating the problem, and diabetes is but one example that I use.

So do people like me, as a New Democrat, does New Democrat Cheri DiNovo? worry about these things? Of course we worry. Do we think about how we should be helping? Naturally. That's why I talked about the whole idea of having professionals like school nurses, physical education teachers and home economists who would deal with that, so we'd talk about these things. But this particular bill says to the school, "You have another responsibility to worry about." Is it something that the school system could handle? Maybe. Does the bill speak to it? Maybe it can't, because you can't put money-related issues into bills. But would this bill, if it goes to committee, get the support of government to say, "Yes, this is okay, but we're going to need more staff in our school system to help them deal with the additional responsibilities that we're passing on"? Or does it not do that? Or does it simply say, "Here's another responsibility that we're going to have to engage principals and teachers in, most of the staff who know or are aware of someone who has diabetes, and make sure that they have a handle on monitoring and treating those students"?

I believe that's all this bill does at the moment. I believe we need to send it to committee for debate so that we can raise these issues and so that other people, parents and educators, can come and tell us how we deal with this issue in a much more effective and human way, rather than passing on yet another responsibility to the teachers and a school system that is struggling to maintain the services that it has and that governments have passed on to them.

So in this regard, I believe it's important to have the debate. It's important to raise the issues. As we speak, and hopefully people are watching these debates, they become aware of the facts. They become aware of the fact that diabetes is a serious issue that needs to be dealt with. They will become aware that two out of three adults and one out of three children aged 12 to 17 in Ontario are

overweight and obese. This is as of 2005. I'm not sure it's gotten better. And 57% of Ontarians are physically inactive. When we're physically active, the body works. In fact, it helps the mind to work a little better. When you're sitting on your derrière day in and day out, hour after hour, you're sluggish. Your body is sluggish, your mind is sluggish and you're not working those toxins out of your system. They stay in your system and cause greater illness. We've got to deal with the fact that people are inactive and most young people are inactive.

I understand that a bill is not intended to solve all those questions. I understand that. But we need to raise the level of awareness around these other issues, around the preventable things that could be done by governments and others and what our role and obligation as a government is to make sure that we give people the tools and the solutions. The answer isn't simply making sure that we treat the disease; rather, it's saying, "Here's what we can do to make sure that we prevent it." We're not doing a good job of that.

I'm going to be supporting the bill presented by the member for Cambridge. I look forward to the debate in committee. I hope the government will support it and I hope they will come up with constructive suggestions on how we can deal with this particular issue in a way that is responsible, in a way that helps those suffering with diabetes, particularly children in our school system, and in a way that gives teachers and others the tools to help.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

1350

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased today to speak to Bill 137, which would require that all staff members who have regular contact with diabetic students receive proper training to provide monitoring and treatment for those diabetic students.

I think we should begin by looking at what's happening now. Back in the days, in the 1980s, when special education students were coming into the mainstream school system, people needed to sort out who does what. The agreement at that time was that school boards will be responsible for the administration of oral medication, and for physically disabled pupils, the boards would also provide such services as lifting and positioning, assistance with mobility, feeding, toileting and general maintenance exercises. In other words, boards are responsible for administering oral medication.

Since then, we've seen Sabrina's Law, which has to do with students who are allergic. As part of that, boards will take responsibility for administering EpiPens, but it's useful to note that with an EpiPen, you simply have to punch in the pen. There's no particular skill involved in dealing with an EpiPen in an emergency situation.

In terms of what the health system is responsible for, the health system has been found to be responsible for doing things like injections, catheterization, manual expression of the bladder, stoma care, postural draining, suctioning and tube feeding.

What you see here is a recognition that teachers should be responsible for doing things that an average

citizen could do—basically, things that have to do with oral medications, toileting and feeding. On the other hand, where a medical procedure is involved, that's a health care procedure. Teachers are not medical practitioners. We need a health care practitioner to do that.

If we look at the details of what's actually in the bill, what we find is that the bill says that "all staff members in all of its schools who have regular contact in the schools with pupils who have or may have diabetes are trained in the monitoring and treatment" that would be required. Note here that it says "all staff members." Who are all staff members in a school? It would be all the teachers, because during the course of supervision, most of the teachers would come into regular contact with a student. You'd have the secretary, the principal, the vice-principal, education assistants and, conceivably, the custodians. A long list of people who are clearly not medical practitioners would be required to be trained.

What would they need to be trained in? They would need to be trained to do blood sugar checks of the pupil and determine what is the medically safe level of blood sugar for the pupil, and then to administer insulin or glucagon or appropriate medication. Note here that the administration of insulin in this context involves injecting the insulin; that is, you actually have to have some medical skill in being able to hit the vein. Perhaps more worrisome is that the initial step, which is to prick the finger and do the blood check, means that you have to be able to make a medical decision around the administration of insulin. If you make the wrong decision, grave harm could come to the student. That is why we and the school sector have always been concerned about forcing teachers and other staff to do a procedure that they're not medically qualified to do.

Now, I acknowledge that there are problems, that sometimes the health system has difficulty in delivering that end, and that's something we need to address with the health system, but I do agree with my colleague from Trinity-Spadina that the solution is not to expect teachers and other school staff to be medical practitioners; they're not. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm pleased to rise today to speak in support of Bill 137, and I would like to start by commending my friend and colleague the member from Cambridge for bringing this important matter forward, especially at a time when juvenile diabetes is on the rise.

This bill, if passed, would require elementary schools to have staff trained in the daily monitoring of blood sugar levels of children who suffer from diabetes. It also calls for trained staff to administer insulin and glucagon when necessary. The bill would also protect school staff by prohibiting any actions taken against them arising out of any assistance that they would provide. If this bill is passed and implemented, it would place Ontario among the leaders in Canada in the management of diabetes in schools. To date, only New Brunswick has legislation in place requiring school boards or schools to accommodate

and protect students with life-threatening illnesses, including diabetes.

I would also like to welcome the Bordman family to the Legislature this afternoon. The Bordmans have been community leaders in bringing this legislation forward, and we thank them for their persistence in this regard. When doing research on this bill, I was alarmed to see how difficult it is for children with diabetes within our school system. I would like to quote a statement from the Canadian Diabetes Association to illustrate to the members of this House the treatment which some children and family members have received in our schools:

"The Canadian Diabetes Association has heard from parents who have been told that their child cannot register at the school because of diabetes. Other parents have told us about their children being denied school trips or educational programs because of their diabetes. And still other parents have contacted our association to discuss how to convince their schools' staff that denying access to orange juice during class or asking the child to test blood glucose levels unsupervised in a washroom or closet is inappropriate and potentially dangerous to the health of the child."

I hope that these are exceptions to the rule, but more than anything, I believe that this further underlines the need to educate our educators on the management of diabetes. The bill does not ask educators to act as nurses, but rather to be prepared to respond appropriately in an emergency situation involving diabetes and to be informed as to proper blood glucose maintenance procedures in order to prevent emergencies from happening.

It's been reported that once a child goes into diabetic shock, there are only a few minutes for action to be taken before the child will begin to suffer from brain damage and possibly death. That being true, even if a parent or guardian were to give up a job to visit their child at school whose blood glucose levels may need to be checked anywhere from two to three times in a school day, there's still no real protection for the child without there being someone trained in diabetic emergencies on site and in the school.

In the time it would take to call a parent to administer life-saving medication, brain damage would already have begun to set in. A 2001 Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation position statement regarding diabetes in schools states:

The "Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation believes that it is essential that children with diabetes be able to monitor their blood glucose levels, eat food and administer insulin, when necessary, in order to manage—to the maximum extent possible—their diabetes. Failure to do so could lead to life-threatening insulin shock and coma caused by low glucose levels and long-term complications such as kidney failure, blindness, amputation, heart disease and stroke exacerbated by high blood glucose levels.

"Children with diabetes need to be able to test their blood glucose at school and apply whatever means necessary to bring these levels to near normal quickly

and with as few encumbrances as possible. For some students this can be done independently; other students—who are young or who have less experience with the disease—need assistance from trained school personnel. All students with diabetes need assistance from trained school personnel in the case of medical emergencies. These trained personnel need not be medical professionals."

In a time where the incidence of type 1 diabetes is rising at a rate of 3% to 5% annually, with the greatest increase among five-year-olds to nine-year-olds, and diabetes diagnoses in children have tripled in recent years, it's imperative that we do something proactive about this situation. We need to develop a level of inclusionary practices in our schools so that children with diabetes are afforded the same opportunities as their fellow students.

I'm pleased to lend my support to this bill and I urge all of the other members of this Legislature to do the same.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm pleased to enter the debate on Bill 137 on the monitoring and treatment of diabetic students in schools. I was listening to the honourable member from Cambridge introducing this bill. I know he has the good intention to help kids in schools, but when I looked at the bill and read it in detail, I thought that it's a really complicated issue; it's not as easy as he says.

1400

I was listening to my colleague from Guelph and the member from Trinity-Spadina talk about the complexity of the issue. It's not fair to expect our teachers or staff in the school to do this procedure, because it's very complex, especially with type 1 diabetes, because it's very dangerous if you deal with it. So you have to have some kind of health qualification in order to do this procedure.

As a matter of fact, I know that our government, as the member from Trinity-Spadina mentioned, spends almost more than \$1 billion on this project across the province of Ontario, trying to create some kind of a strategy in order to deal with it, because we believe strongly that it's important for all of us to create a healthy society, a healthy environment, healthy communities and healthy populations. So therefore we are talking about prevention; you're right. You were part of the committee that debated banning junk food from schools and also trans fats from schools. All these initiatives have been taking place in this place—in this amazing and historic chamber. Many people from different parties participated in the debate, because our interest was to create some kind of mechanism in order to prohibit trans fats from schools, junk food from the cafeterias and from the machines of schools, and also create a habit to exercise and also promote healthy activities.

I was part of a project in London that was launched by the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health Promotion to award all the schools who participated in this initiative to introduce healthy food to schools, like

fruit and vegetables, instead of junk food, pop or Coke or chocolate bars.

It's a long way to achieve our goal, but we are taking the right steps in the right direction in order to make sure our schools are free of trans fats and also to create an activities program. We invested many, many millions of dollars in many different communities to come to schools and exercise and also initiate all these programs in order to keep the people healthy and active as part of our strategy as a government to create a healthy community and healthy populations.

In turn, asking all the teachers and the staff to be able to deal with type 1 diabetes, I think is unfair, this strategy. We have to be logical in terms of—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: We're going to bring back school nurses?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Maybe. It's a good idea for discussions. I don't mind that.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Speak to it. Say it.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: You know what? Whatever it takes in order to create prevention and whatever it takes to create a healthy school and a healthy environment—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Say that, because you didn't say it.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: The member from Trinity-Spadina was trying to tell me. You know what? That's why we are here. Everything is open for dialogue. Everything is open for debate. I'm open for everything. Everything is to protect our population, our students, because they're the future of this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak and comment, and the member from Cambridge.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I want to congratulate my colleague the member for Cambridge for having listened to the concerns of his constituents Terry Bordman and his twin daughters, Brooke and Jade, who Mr. Martiniuk has indicated are with us today. That's what an MPP is supposed to do. An MPP is supposed to listen to the concerns of the constituents that he or she serves and then make their best attempt to address the issue. That's what the member from Cambridge has attempted to do today. He has listened to the story that was presented to him. We have a situation where there are two young girls who suffer from diabetes. It was, of course, their own personal experience that has prompted the legislation and encouraged Mr. Martiniuk to bring forward this bill, which would help these young children to be able to manage their disease while at school.

I think one of the things that we've always prided ourselves on in our province—was to ensure that our schools are accessible and able to provide opportunities for all of our children and that we can provide them with a safe, secure environment. In this instance, Mr. Martiniuk is specifically referring to the fact that those children—whose numbers are on the increase—who suffer from diabetes should have the opportunity to be able to participate fully. Also, I think it's important to know that

he is supported in this bill and in requests for changes by the Canadian Diabetes Association and the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

We've heard some different comments. No doubt, this is a bill that is going to require some further discussion. It's going to require some further debate. It needs to go to committee. There needs to be an opportunity to receive some of the opinions of other parents, some of the health stakeholders, and some of the other experts who would like to provide some input as to the recommendations contained within the bill that Mr. Martiniuk is introducing today.

We do know that if you are the parent of a child with type 1 diabetes, it can be quite stressful. I have a neighbour whose daughter was diagnosed this past year with diabetes, and it was a very stressful time for that family. Her daughter was beginning school, and she was really quite concerned about what might be expected of her, as a parent who had a job and also an infant. Fortunately, she reported to me that the school is able to provide the support that is necessary and she won't have to make the daily trips into the school. However, not all families, not all children, in the province of Ontario have the type of support my neighbour and her daughter had. Sometimes schools are simply not able, for many, many reasons, to accommodate the needs of children with diabetes in their classrooms. We need to look at how we can make this possible, and so we have this legislation that is here before us today.

We've heard about how this may be of some concern to the educational sector, and I think we have to take a look. We have all these silos, and maybe we need to take a look and move beyond just involving the Ministry of Education in finding a solution. Maybe we have to take a look at what role there may be for the Ministry of Health. We have a Ministry of Children and Youth Services in this province. So maybe the solution to address the needs of these children can best be found if we have all of the ministries that are responsible for children's services in one way or the other working together.

But regardless as to what solution is found, we need to find a solution. This is a very serious problem. Parents need to have confidence that the needs of their children, their health needs and their other needs, can be addressed within our school system.

So I congratulate my colleague, who has responded to the concerns that have been brought to his attention. I would encourage us to send this bill out to committee so that we can have a fulsome debate and we can make sure that we can find the answers to the needs of parents whose children have diabetes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm certainly pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 137, An Act to amend the Education Act to allow pupils with diabetes in schools to receive certain monitoring and treatment.

I would like to thank the member from Cambridge for introducing this private member's bill because it led me

to actually inquire very specifically as to the situation in York region with both school boards. We've heard from the member for Guelph what the overall policy is, and I wanted to find out a little bit more as to what was actually happening for those constituents in my riding with diabetes.

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My investigations resulted in what I would call a very reassuring situation, particularly in my board. The basic philosophy these days is that most diabetics, including those very young students, in fact are capable of managing their own sugar and insulin intake. Where they are very young, and where they need some assistance, both boards establish a medical care plan that is approved by a physician, parent/guardian, and the school administrator. It clearly outlines the procedures to be followed in the school setting for the monitoring of insulin levels and response to a perceived emergency diabetic reaction.

I inquired as to whether, in the York region board's area, there were concerns amongst certain parents, and I was told by a superintendent that there was perhaps a handful of parents. In fact, they've been continuing to work with those parents. The public board is going to be releasing a little bit more of an advanced policy, to include an educational component as well and a number of other different mechanisms.

Of course, the community care access centre is available in those situations where the child is unstable.

Children are coming to school with insulin pumps. There's no question, as the member for Cambridge has said, that we are very concerned about the increasing incidence of diabetes. Prevention is certainly something that our government has embraced very, very strongly, as so well detailed by my friend from London—Fanshawe.

There was some allusion to the day when nurses were in the schools—public health nurses. I remember that very well in 1988, when I first started as the medical officer of health for York region. I would like to remind everyone that the Premier at that time was David Peterson.

Since then, subsequent governments' cutting back on public health funding—downloading—has resulted in the situation where we have public health nurses available for consultation, not necessarily in the school, because our philosophy very much these days is for responsibility, for individuals taking personal responsibility for their health and doing all they can.

In the case of children, clearly parents want to be front and centre in those decisions and this is why the current Education Act allows for boards to engage with parents and come up with the best solution for their child.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

The member for Cambridge, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I would like to thank the members for Trinity-Spadina, Kitchener-Waterloo, Guelph, Whitby-Oshawa, London-Fanshawe, and Mississauga-Brampton South.

With nurses no longer working in our elementary schools, I urge all of you to support this bill as a way of extending our support to the thousands of young children in our province who must meet the daily challenges of type 1 diabetes.

This bill is supported by the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation and the Canadian Diabetes Association, two not-for-profit organizations dedicated to improving the lives of those touched by diabetes.

Just as we protect children with life-threatening allergies, we have a responsibility to care for young children with diabetes. I believe that this bill deserves your consideration and should be referred to a committee in order to refine it, if necessary, as it really is important, especially with the increase of the incidence of type 1 diabetes in our society.

MUNICIPALITIES

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I move that, in the opinion of this House, a Select Committee on Municipal Governance for municipalities with populations greater than 500,000 people be appointed to consider and report to the House its observations and recommendations with respect to alternative governance models for larger municipalities. In developing its recommendations the committee will:

(1) Work with municipal politicians, academics, experts and other interested parties to determine better governance models for larger municipalities;

(2) Recognize the low turnout of voters for municipal elections;

(3) Recognize the very high rate of incumbents re-elected;

(4) Recognize the difficulty of a mayor to get consensus from a large number of independent councillors;

(5) Recognize the difficulty electors face in determining the platforms of the candidates with regard to broad municipal and fiscal issues;

(6) Consider the pros and cons of the current municipal governance model;

(7) Consider the terms, timing and conditions of a referendum for the approval by municipal electors of any municipality for any change of governance in their municipality;

(8) Consider the introduction of political parties and party financing at the municipal level;

(9) Consider term limitations for elected municipal officials;

(10) Consider models from other large municipalities in jurisdictions outside of Ontario;

That the committee shall present, or if the House is not sitting, shall release by depositing with the Clerk of the House, its final report to the assembly no later than the date provided in standing order 6(a)(ii) for the end of the fall meeting period in 2009, except that if the committee determines that more time is required to complete its final report, it may present or, if the House is not sitting, release by depositing with the Clerk of the House, an

interim report in which an alternative date for the final report is established, which is not more than 90 days later;

That the committee have the authority to meet at the call of the Chair, to call for persons, papers and things, to employ counsel and staff and, as the committee deems relevant to its terms of reference, to commission reports and adjourn from place to place; and

That in the event of, and notwithstanding, any prorogation of the House before the presentation of the committee's final report, the committee shall be deemed to be continued to the subsequent session or sessions and may continue to meet during any such prorogation; and

That the committee may examine any other matter it deems relevant to its terms of reference; and

That the committee be composed of four members from the government, two from the official opposition and one from the third party. The membership of the committee shall be filed with the Clerk of the Assembly by the whips of the recognized parties no later than Thursday, March 26, 2009.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Pursuant to standing order 98, you have 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I want, at the outset, to indicate what the effect of this resolution would be, if passed. This would not bind the House or actually strike the standing committee. All it is is an opinion of the House that a standing committee with these particular recommendations should be struck. I am quite willing to accept other suggestions as to the terms of reference, the timing of the report and that kind of thing.

My overall thrust in this is to seek some kind of resolution from the Legislature that (a) there is a problem with regard to the governance of our large municipalities, and (b) we are the body, as given by our Constitution, that should deal with this and the only body that can deal with it.

A few short years ago, three new large cities were formed that now have more than 500,000 people in them. Those are the city of Toronto, the city of Ottawa and the city of Hamilton.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I remember that.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I remember it, too. As well, the city of Mississauga, which was already formed, has over 500,000 people.

Since that time, some of those municipalities have struggled with the governing of their new municipalities. I think that that fact has been recognized by many citizens, many editorials and many reports, which I'm going to refer to shortly.

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As well, it has been recognized by some of our municipal politicians. In fact, I'm proud and glad that ward 16 councillor Karen Stintz is here to support my resolution today from the city of Toronto. I've also had support from some of the councillors from Mississauga: Carolyn Parrish. As well, I've had support for a review from

former councillors and some present councillors in the city of Ottawa.

The purpose of this resolution is not to take a position on any of the specific issues. It's not to take a position on whether we should have political parties. It's not to take a position on whether we should have term limitations. But it is to recognize that there is a problem and that we should collectively, in a select committee, sit down, talk to our municipalities, talk to academics and talk to other people who are interested in the subject to see if we can come up with a better model.

My principal concern with regard to this issue is the disconnect that exists between the mayor, who is seen as the chief executive by the electorate, and the individuality of the councillors who sit on the council. I'm referring, first, to a report put out by the Institute on Governance, which was a collection of academics prior to the 2006 municipal election. They said, which I believe illustrates or shows my central concern, "A broader approach to improving accountability should consider issues such as: the difficulty of ensuring any accountability at a broad level in the absence of a vision, or a coherent agenda for change that is endorsed by several members of council, that is presented to citizens at election time, and that provides a basis for assessing what has been achieved during a mayor's or council's term in office."

This week, the city of Ottawa made public their study, *Governing Ottawa: Strategic Thinking for a Winning City*. The "task force on governance found that city council does not operate effectively and cannot provide the strategic leadership the city of Ottawa needs because of systemic problems with governance. Without addressing these governance shortcomings, council will remain ineffective no matter how hard councillors, the mayor and staff work."

My concern is not with how hard our councillors are working in the city of Ottawa or anywhere else. I believe most councillors work very hard to represent their constituents. My concern relates more to the fact that the elector does not have any idea, other than the name of their councillors, when they step into the ballot box, as to what the views of their councillor are with regard to the broad city issues and long-term strategic issues, and so we have a serious disconnect in our system. We have a serious disconnect with regard to how a mayor can run, and there is no executive effectively in these very large and important institutions that we have.

The Ottawa task force identified three major governance problems: Strategic thinking is missing, councillors are not contributing effectively to city-wide government, and citizens are disengaged because of that. In Ottawa in the 2006 election, which of course I am most familiar with, coming from that area, the major focus of that election was on the mayoralty campaign. We had a very high turnout because of that. People thought, in voting for Mr. Larry O'Brien, who is now the mayor of the city of Ottawa, that his vision was what they were voting for. They did not realize that he was only one of 23 council-

lors and that subsequent votes or decisions in the city of Ottawa council would be controlled not by Larry O'Brien or an executive, nor would he have any more power. Each and every councillor only had one vote. I think that we have that problem here in the city of Toronto, as I have read on numerous occasions in the paper here as well.

The results are that people are disengaged from the process. They only vote on the basis of the name and not on the basis of policy for the good of their city as a whole. This is demonstrated so clearly by the statistics in the 2006 municipal elections across the four cities that I mentioned.

In the city of Toronto there were 275 candidates for 44 council seats. When it came down to council seats, 36 of 37 incumbents were returned. The only incumbent who was defeated was by another former councillor and MPP, Tony Perruzza. In Mississauga, there were 76 candidates for 11 seats on council, including 23 in one seat. All of the incumbents were re-elected in Mississauga. In Ottawa, all of the incumbents were re-elected in all 23 council seats. In Hamilton, all incumbents were elected save one, and the incumbent in Hamilton lost to a former MPP of our Legislature, Brad Clark, who I believe was also involved in municipal politics before he became an MPP.

In all, 73 of 75 incumbents in our four largest cities were re-elected and the other two lost to former councillors, former MPPs who could almost be described as incumbents themselves. This is the result because, in my opinion, there is little difference between one candidate and the other candidate with regard to broad issues.

I believe that we should examine whether we can come up with a better model. They have different kinds of approaches for municipal government in large cities in other provinces in our country. Vancouver has a different model, as well as the cities and municipalities in the province of Quebec. I think that the case has been proven that there is need for study on this matter. I am not here to stand and say what that case should be. I think we should work with municipalities. I think we should work with the people of these four great cities in the province of Ontario and come up with a better solution than the governance model we have today.

I was a great supporter, a long time ago, of the board of control model which we had in the old city of Ottawa. I thought it should be under consideration as well, but far be it from me to come to the conclusion as to what the fix should be. All I'm saying is, there is a problem. Let's have a select committee look at this, call in the players, work with the municipalities and see if, in fact, we can come up with a better governance model for our four largest cities in our great province of Ontario.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to rise to the debate today. I do want to be very upfront to the member from Mississippi Mills—

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Carleton–Mississippi Mills.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Thank you.

I will not be supporting your motion, and I want to be very clear why I'm not. I think that it is always important to constantly review things, constantly look at things, and to make sure they provide the accountability and the transparency that the people expect. So I'm very pleased to report to the House that this is under review and it has been under review. The Municipal Elections Act and the City of Toronto Act are under review as we speak, and prior to this motion coming forward. A thorough review will be conducted. I know that you want to know who's going to be a part of that review: AMO, the city of Toronto, AMCTO, the federation of urban neighbours, MPAC, municipal submissions, Elections Ontario. There will be feedback from the public and stakeholders and members of the Legislature.

Also, just so that you know, because I know you're part of this committee, the member from Vaughan has formed a select committee to review the provincial election legislation. I know there have been comments made on municipal elections as well that have been sent to that committee, and I know that you are a member of that committee, so I know that you are very aware of this.

We start from a different place, though, from the members on the other side of the House. I know that you don't start at the same place. We start on this basis: We will work with our municipalities and we will respect them. We will come together and work on common solutions that are in the best interests of the people of Ontario. That's why we came forward with the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review: \$1.5 billion uploaded, and we know who downloaded that. That came from the previous government. So I've got to tell you I think it's just a little rich when I'm sitting here and once again we're getting the approach about, "We'll tell you what's good for you." You did not have any conversation with AMO. You did not have any conversation with AMCTO. Those are the bodies that we will work with. That did not happen, and I've got to tell you it's déjà vu all over again today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to commend the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills for bringing forward this motion. I want to say this isn't a motion—and obviously we heard the member read it earlier in the proceedings—of fixing a problem. This is a motion about setting up a select committee of the Legislature to consult with all the people who are involved to come up with a plan that would deal with the problem that's here. As we hear from across the aisle, "We're not supporting this resolution because it hasn't had enough consultation," I just want to point out that the consultation the member opposite is talking about is a consultation that has been taking place each and every time after municipal elections or after elections. They set up another committee to review how the process went and then, when they've reviewed that, they tweak changes.

But at no time in the history of Ontario have they changed the structure of how municipal government works. Back in 1850, when the Baldwin Act was implemented, they set up municipal government. That included electing local people. At that time, if it was a large area that they were covering, it was five people. If it was a small area, it was three people. Every one of those who were elected knew every person who was going to vote. They only met once or twice a year to deal with the issues of the municipality, which only included making sure we all got the roads built that needed building to get to the next place, where we were building a new sawmill.

Times have changed since then. There are things now that the municipalities do that have nothing to do with the next sawmill. It has to do with all the services the people in the municipality require. I think the introducer of the motion was very clear on the challenge we're facing of how reluctant people are now—not who voted and who didn't vote and whether the right number of polling stations were open, but how people are elected based on the individuality of the individual.

When I ran in politics in 1980, the first time, I shook every hand in the ward that got to vote for me. Those people knew me and still do, I suppose, in that small area. But somebody running in the city of Toronto—and I think that points out that the challenge we face with the election of incumbents almost all the time is because people don't know the individuals personally. No one, incidentally, has a platform that they're running on. They all have views. Some are views that want to do one thing and some are something else, but at the end of the day, it makes no difference because in fact not even the mayor of the municipality who will be elected by all the people in the municipality can implement that policy on which they ran.

When I was running for mayor, it was great to go around and tell people, "If you elect me, I will do this, this and this." Then as soon as I got there, I read the Municipal Act and it said that I am one of nine equals. It doesn't matter what you want to do unless four other people who were elected, who incidentally may very well have had a totally different view of the situation at election time—unless four of those will support the mayor, nothing happens.

That's why I think it is so important that we look at the structure of local government. I said that this was in place since I think it was 1854 or somewhere in that neighbourhood, through the Baldwin Act. The only one I'm aware of that has somewhat changed is in the City of Toronto Act, where the government saw fit to give a different status for the mayor. But they didn't go so far as to actually change the structure so that the mayor would have the support of members of council in any way, obligated by the way they ran for council.

Unless there is some system that says that we will have like-minded people in sufficient numbers to actually implement the policies that are put forward, chances are it's not going to happen. That's why I'm so pleased to support this resolution: not because the solution is in this

document, but in fact it's setting up the committee to look at what the solutions might be, and we can implement those and have better government for the local people in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm pleased to be able to join this debate. I'm going to say from the outset that I will be supporting this particular item introduced by the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills.

I know that there are going to be a lot of municipal politicians who are going to be really unhappy with Norm, the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills, but we do have a constitutional right to review, to change, even to beat up on municipalities if we want to from time to time. That's not something that I advocate, of course. There have been governments that have done that and they've done it with glee; it's not as if it's unnatural for governments to do that. But yes, they will be unhappy because they will have said in the end that whatever changes we make should be in the spirit of collaboration, that we should consult and talk to them, which the Liberals say they have done, which is what Tories say they have done—although if you look at what Mike Harris did, you'd never know it.

The point is that I believe that doing a review of this sort is a very useful exercise. I disagree with some of the elements in this bill, but a review is helpful. Whether or not the creation of an alternative governance model for larger municipalities will address any one of these issues is up for debate, because I don't believe governance addresses some of these issues; I don't believe it does or ever will. But is it useful to have a select committee on municipal governance to talk about some of these issues or other issues that I'm going to touch on? I think it is.

"(1) Work with municipal politicians, academics, experts and other interested parties to determine better governance models"—okay; that's a useful thing. I'm not sure anybody would disagree with that.

"(2) Recognize the low turnout of voters for municipal elections." That is a huge issue, a huge issue for everyone, in fact, and if it isn't, it ought to be. Is it connected to governance? I frankly don't believe it. But it would be useful to have some academics speak to this. Does governance determine voter turnout? One way or the other, are there some political models here in Canada or beyond that can show us the way in this regard? And if there are, maybe some academics can help.

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I don't believe governance is the issue. We have a provincial problem where turnouts in every election are getting lower and lower. It isn't just municipalities that suffer this problem; it's provinces, it's the federal government. Every election, fewer and fewer people vote. It should concern all politicians that the turnout is very low. I happen to believe that we should be working with young people in our high schools as a way of creating an educational awareness of politics and the effects of politics on their lives as students, and on their families.

We do a poor job of that. Provincially, we do a poor job of this, and federally, even poorer. There are two civics courses in our curriculum—half-time courses. That's it. How can any young person ever hope at the end of a half-time course or two to say, "I like politics. Gee, I want to get involved. I didn't know that politics affected me this way. I didn't know who my municipal councillor was but now, with this half-time course, I do." By the end of the half-time course, no one is engaged, and those who are engaged come from middle-class, professional homes or from homes where their mum or dad might have been a politician, or granddad or grandma might have been a politician somewhere down the line. It's very much class related.

In my family, we never talked politics. In my high school, Harbord Collegiate, we never spoke of politics. There was a young socialist and I thought, "My goodness, what is he and what does it stand for?" A young socialist, grade 12 or 13—never heard of it. I didn't know what it meant. But in the eyes of those who knew, he was some radical. The point is, you could count the number of students in any one high school who are connected to politics or have an interest; the vast majority have no knowledge and do not want to be involved. Is a municipal governance model going to change that? I don't believe that—I don't. I believe very much in a proportional representation system that Tories didn't support and neither did Liberals, with the exception of a few of them. But will that change the voter turnout? I think somewhat, not radically; I believe it's a fairer system. But unless we get young people involved in the political process, to understand it, they will be like me—not involved for a long, long time, until chance comes along.

It was pure chance that got me involved. I could have been, and would have been, a teacher of English and French all my life until, by accident, I acquired an interest, through reading, in politics and connected left-leaning readings to me and my life. But it was an accident. My point is, we need to include in this kind of discussion or review how it is that we get young people involved, otherwise the voter turnout will never, ever change. In fact, it can get worse, if anything.

There have been politicians, both provincial and federal, who have turned off the public to politics and politicians. There are politicians today both in the provinces and in Canada who make it their vocation to diminish politics and politicians. There are newspapers that revel in dirty politics, thus diminishing the roles and obligations of politicians and governments. We do ourselves no favours, some of us, because the attacks sometimes are on individuals. They're not on ideas, but they're on individuals, and there are quite a number of people—left, middle and right—who do this and diminish the political process. It's not part of this for you, but it should be.

We have anti-political movements. We have anti-politician movements. People take pride in it. How often do we hear people saying, "Ah, you're all the same"? When I hear that I say: "If we're all the same, why am I

with the NDP when we only have 10 seats? Why don't I just quickly join the Liberals where I can be in government and be a minister, and we're done. Have a better raise, have a better life, take it easy, drive in neutral, always take that balanced approach—beautiful, that balanced approach—that's neither here nor there." It would be so nice and easy, but I can't do that because, you see, I don't believe in that kind of stuff.

The things I speak about are not part of this motion. "(3) Recognize the very high rate of incumbents re-elected." Yes, I understand that, but you know what we might want to look at? It's the fact that we allow corporations and developers to contribute to the majority of these city councillors and, by and large, those developers that support those city councillors get re-elected over and over again.

Let's get rid of corporate donations and union donations, as Manitoba and Quebec have done. Why can't we do that? Why can't we take the developer out of the political process through those donations? Some city councillors say, "I'm not affected by that." Of course you are. If you get \$750 and the guy asks for a meeting, you're going to give him that meeting. If that developer comes to influence you in one way or the other, you're going to say, "I'll do my best." Some of them are very well connected to them, if you know what I mean. Some of you do know what I mean, because many of you come from the city councillor profession. So I'm telling you, get rid of corporate donations. That's how you get rid of the influence, and that's how you might bring on board some different individuals.

By the way, wouldn't it be nice in Toronto and the GTA, where most of the people come from visible minority backgrounds, to do a big effort to make sure we get them to run and that we support them? If you look at city council, any city council, we don't have much diversity. If you look at Queen's Park, there isn't much diversity in this place. It's the same old stuff. Look around. With the exception of a couple of people, we all look the same, with a shade of difference, and some are whiter than others. That's true in more ways than one. I understand that.

"Recognize the difficulty of a mayor to get consensus from a large number of independent councillors." What the heck is that, Norm? I mean, who is independent? I don't know one city councillor who is independent. Every city councillor is either a New Democrat, and there are a few of them—most city councillors are Liberals, and most of the other city councillors, particularly outside the GTA, are Tories. There is no independent city councillor.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: That's Toronto. You're doing Toronto, Rosie.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm doing everything, Madam.

So I don't understand what that means. There is no independent politician that I'm aware of.

"Recognize the difficulty electors face in determining the platforms of the candidates." What about provincial

politics? Yes, we have party politics, but most people don't have a clue and they think we're all the same, so we have a lot of work to do. I only have had 34 seconds. We have a lot of work to do in terms of how we educate, how we politicize, how we get people involved and, yes, we must do that. If this motion does it, I'm willing to support it, and I'm willing to look at how we expand this particular motion to make sure that we do a better job of getting people to vote, but I'm willing to support it. Merci, monsieur le Président.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to follow the member for Trinity-Spadina, who I think, personally, would have made an excellent leadership candidate in what's happening on Saturday. It is not too late yet. I think there's still time for Rosario.

I spent 18 years on council in the town of Oakville, in the region of Halton. Actually, some of the best years of my life were spent on council. I was first elected in my 20s, I was still there in my 30s and 40s, and I had the privilege of serving under four Premiers who were in office during my term on council, and that goes back to Peterson, to Rae, to Harris and Eves. I went through some of the severe upheavals that were inflicted on local councils. Believe me, it wasn't a whole lot of fun, trying to run your community in a responsible way when the senior level of government was causing you nothing but grief.

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I have to say, when I look at some of my colleagues who are still on council, that the relationship I, as a member of the provincial government, have with those colleagues is the best it has been in memory. For the entire 20 or 25 years since I was first elected to council, I cannot think of a time when the relationship between the provincial government and local government was better than it is today.

I want to thank the member for bringing the issue forward. I'll be honest from the start: I will not be supporting it, and not because the issues individually don't have merit. They are issues that should be talked about. They are issues that I think could be the subject of debate. But in my opinion as an individual member, they don't add up to what a select committee is designed to do.

As I said, I have concerns with some reform I'd still like to see with local governments. But when the economy is experiencing the stress it is today, when nations around the world and their governments, and communities around the world and their governments, are trying to deal with some of the monetary problems we're experiencing, is now the time for a navel-gazing exercise as to how we should run our towns and cities? I'd suggest it's not.

There's some very even-handed wording in the resolution. I think the resolution is drafted well and, as I said, it raises some wonderful points. But at the end of the day, the point needs to be made that the issue of local

governance is frankly very different from the issue of local elections, and to try to tie them together—they're two separate issues that may be linked in some ways, but they're miles apart in the type of work that would need to be done to devote the proper attention to them that they really need.

We've been through some tough issues at the local level in my own community. We've been able to deal with it, with the relationship we've been able to forge. I don't think this is necessary.

I want to compliment the member again for bringing it forward. Perhaps at some point in the future, this type of debate could take place, and perhaps at that point the select committee would be the vehicle to do it. But I think the amount of emphasis being put on this today should be brought to bear on the finances of local government. In the future, they're going to have some real stress trying to meet their own budgets as we meet ours. That's where we need to be focusing our efforts.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to rise in support of my colleague the member for Carleton-Mississippi Mills with this important resolution. As is the character of the member for Carleton-Mississippi Mills, he's looking further down the road.

It has been about 10 years or so since the three large cities were created—Mississauga has grown tremendously to hit this level. Looking at how our traditional governance structures fit large municipalities is an issue that should be thoroughly investigated.

As members know, and as my colleague Mr. Sterling mentioned, Vancouver, Montreal and Quebec City have political parties in their makeup. Their councils—at least, Vancouver's—tend to be smaller.

In the United Kingdom and the United States, across the border from us, as Mr. Craitor certainly knows, it's common for municipal politicians to have political parties. It's actually rare that they do not. Toronto did. They ran a slate of NDP candidates back in the early 1990s. Jack Layton was the leader of the party, but suffered under the Bob Rae yoke at the time and was not successful.

I believe a healthy democracy needs healthy competition. If you have a good race for the individual council seats as well as the mayoral contest, that's in the best interests of everyone.

It is awfully difficult, in large cities, to get a message across if you are challenging an incumbent. I know, from some councillors and their offices, that in the city of Toronto, for example, campaign budgets are very limited. They can barely afford to do a couple of mail-outs, let alone buy an advertisement in the Etobicoke Guardian to take on an incumbent.

Political parties would give folks an opportunity to get their message across. It would take what is happening on a de facto basis and make it much more transparent and formalized.

Political parties often give the ability too for councillors to first set priorities, to caucus items ahead of

time, to forge coalitions and ensure that there are standards on the fundraising side.

There are major, expensive items that large city councils would deal with that go beyond the local issues. For example, should priorities in Toronto be subways and roads versus police, versus social services in the Hamilton area? We often hear a big debate about the Lister Block, Randle Reef or airport development. If there were identification along party lines, it would help voters understand where, ideologically, individual councillors line up on the spectrum, because I'm not convinced that voters will always know where we're going to stand individually on the issues. Alignments along parties give an important signal of where a councillor may approach an issue coming forward, one that may be unexpected as of election time.

There has been some academic research in this area that I think is important to add to this debate, and I do hope that we'll proceed with further debate. In *Local Government in Canada*, Richard Tindal and Susan Nobes Tindal say, "At the provincial and federal levels, voters are accustomed to selecting one name from three or four or so, all of them normally associated with a political party. In contrast, the municipal voter must make choices from within several different categories from among much longer lists of names, none of them further identified with any kind of party label," making it awfully difficult for an incumbent to fight his or her way through the noise.

Mary Louise McAllister in *Governing Ourselves? The Politics of Canadian Communities*, says, "From the perspective of strengthening democracy," Jack "Masson has argued that it would be easier to hold a governing party accountable for its actions at election time, rather than an assortment of individual candidates who stand for a mixture of issues."

Furthermore, as noted in the Institute on Governance's Forum on Municipal Governance and Accountability, it helps to forge a coherent vision and agenda so the voters can choose the major issues that are impacting large cities. That would be different from small-town Ontario.

Please support my colleague's motion before the House today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn): Further speakers?

Mr. Jeff Leal: It is a pleasure for me today to make some comments on the motion that's being put forward by the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills.

I have a municipal background. I was a six-term, 18-year veteran of Peterborough city council and then came to the Ontario Legislature in 2003. I can say right up front that when I was elected to city council in Peterborough, indeed I was an independent person, as were most of my colleagues at that particular time. I certainly admit that I look at this motion through the eyes of my experience in a city of some 74,000 people.

But over the years I did take the time to review the writings of Professor Andrew Sancton, who teaches at the University of Western Ontario and has certainly

provided a lot of commentary over many years about governance models and citizen engagement in municipal politics in the province of Ontario. Professor Sancton started to identify the problem going right back to 1975, when the then Duke of Kent, the Honourable W. Darcy McKeough, brought regional government to the province of Ontario.

Andrew Sancton's view always was that as we created these larger municipal institutions across the province of Ontario, there was a decline in citizen engagement because of the sheer size that these municipalities became. In fact, many of those citizens who became part of these amalgamated municipalities, of course, lost their distinct identification and therefore lost some of their engagement in the municipal process. Hazel McCallion, I believe, started her political career as reeve of Streetsville, which was a very small community in those days, and she talks rather longingly about that experience.

Many of the things that are identified in this motion today were certainly articulated very clearly prior to the big-city amalgamations, in the debates here in Toronto, in Ottawa and Hamilton. I note my next-door neighbour in Peterborough, Steve Brickell, who at that time, before amalgamation, was the deputy clerk in Scarborough. He came to Peterborough to become clerk there. I remember having long chats with Steve about what the amalgamation would mean and the real disengagement of citizens in the process.

So I won't be supporting this resolution.

1500

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn): Further speakers?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Thank you very much, and I'm certainly very pleased to support the resolution that's been put forward by my colleague the member for—

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Carleton-Mississippi Mills.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Carleton-Mississippi Mills. I would also like to point out to you that the newspaper at home, and others, have taken a look at this resolution and are quite supportive. I think it's important to remember that. There is a recognition that this is a situation today that requires a thorough review. There needs to be, certainly, fairness and accountability brought to the municipal level.

The suggestion here is that that review take place here at Queen's Park. There is no predetermined outcome that is contained herein, but certainly if we were to set up an all-party committee, and if we were to take a look at municipal governance in Ontario's large cities, there would be an opportunity to look freshly again at an issue which I think is of great importance today in the province of Ontario.

And who knows? If we were to take a look at this issue again, in light of all that has happened in the intervening years, we may well come up with a blueprint which could move us forward and address some of the problems that we've seen in the past. It's really quite disappointing that people are not coming out to vote. On

the other hand, we have people who have been holding municipal office for years and years and years. I think those are both issues that need to be addressed.

In my own community of Waterloo, we don't have a problem with people hanging on to their seats. It appears that the voters in Waterloo are quite happy dumping mayor after mayor after mayor and council after council after council, but—

Mr. Dave Levac: Don't run, Liz.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: No. But in other communities, we know that certainly there have been people who have been there for a long time. So Mr. Sterling is not recommending that any specific reform be imposed; he's simply suggesting that we establish the select committee here at Queen's Park and that we would take a look at introducing political parties at the municipal level and take a look at term limits for members of city councils. Hopefully, at the end of the day, we just might get greater voter participation. I will be supporting this resolution.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn): Further speakers?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a constituent who has a bit of a reputation. Her name is Hazel McCallion. Mayor McCallion often says to us who were elected from the city of Mississauga, "Do your homework." And I would have to ask here, has the member done his homework? Did he consult with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, with the Rural Ontario Municipal Association and on and on? No.

Mayor McCallion has 30 years in office. Some of the proposals that the member mentioned—well, he doesn't exactly advocate them, but he proposes them because he thinks they should be discussed—would disqualify someone with that body of knowledge, that wealth of experience, and for 30 years Mayor McCallion has been bringing home victories by margins of more than 90% of the vote.

The member points out that all the incumbents in Mississauga were elected—and that is very true. But when we have had a performance issue on Mississauga city council in the past, we have thrown them out.

The reason that people are re-elected in Mississauga with margins of between 80 and the low 90s is because generally people are happy with them. They're capable, they're competent and they do their jobs well. My councillor in ward 9, Pat Saito, has 18 years of experience; George Carlson, in ward 6, has 12-plus years of experience.

This makes as much sense as going to see your accountant at tax time and having the managing partner say, "I'm sorry, the accountant you had has more than 12 years of experience, so we just told him to go ahead and do something else with the rest of his life because he has been an accountant for too long." Or going to see your kid's orthodontist and having the managing partner of the office say, "I'm sorry, the orthodontist who has fitted your children for the last dozen years no longer works for us. We just decided that he'd been an orthodontist for too long, so we asked him to go and do something else."

This is not the reason that we should strike a select committee. We cannot justify investing the resources of the taxpayer based on very little more than the member's opinion, however well intentioned; and this is a long-serving member. No matter what the member may think, this just shows that we don't have the body of work, the homework, behind this resolution to justify striking a select committee to tour the province and to ask this particular set of questions. The long and the short of it is that while I respect the member in his long years of service here, I cannot stand and support his resolution.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn): Further speakers?

Seeing none, the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I want to thank those members who spoke in support of this. I find the government's position on this very defensive, I find their arguments specious and silly, and I'm very disappointed. However, I find that not unusual or surprising in that this government continues to avoid addressing problems that are there on the horizon. I believe a good government should step up and try to meet those problems and deal with those problems when they are recognized. This problem has been recognized—is recognized—and we should deal with it now. I am really disappointed in how this government cocoons itself into the position that they don't want to do anything; don't touch anything that you don't have to right now. The next government will have to deal with this.

HOLODOMOR MEMORIAL DAY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE JOUR COMMÉMORATIF DE L'HOLODOMOR

Mr. Levac moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 147, An Act to proclaim Holodomor Memorial Day / Projet de loi 147, Loi proclamant le Jour commémoratif de l'Holodomor.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Pursuant to standing order 98, Mr. Levac, you and your co-movers have 12 minutes.

Mr. Dave Levac: Let me explain first why we are seeing this bill. It's familiar to most. There have been two key developments that have taken place with the introduction of this bill that I think are very important to point out before I get started into the body of my comments. The first is that we do have new information and I'd like to share that with the members to explain why the bill is coming around again.

Since the first introduction back in 2008, I'd like to point out that the government of Ukraine, the United States House of Representatives, the United States Senate, the Parliament of Canada, the Senate of Canada, the governments of Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and the OSCE—the Organization for Security and Co-

operation in Europe—and the European Union, along with 64 other jurisdictions—previously over 40, now at least 64—have made official condemnation of Holodomor and recognize it as genocide. To that fact, I included in the bill, “On May 29 2008, the Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (‘Holodomor’) Memorial Day Act (Canada) was enacted to recognize the famine as an act of genocide and to establish throughout Canada the Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (‘Holodomor’) Memorial Day on the fourth Saturday in November in each year.” I think it’s appropriate for us to revisit this because of that particular fact.

I would also like to say that the second reason why this is an important aspect of private members’ time, which I have been known to speak very highly of in terms of our support and our opportunity to bring new ideas to this place, is that it’s the first time in the history of Ontario that this bill will be sponsored by three people—one New Democrat, the member for Parkdale–High Park, Cheri DiNovo, and the member for Newmarket–Aurora, a Progressive Conservative, Mr. Frank Klees. We’re making history today. I think that’s a proud moment about private members’ time, where we can set aside partisan ideological beliefs and understand that everyone has a right to bring to this place concepts and ideas that all of us can embrace. I’m sure, I’m absolutely confident, that we will be able to embrace this bill with three-party acceptance.

1510

I’d like to introduce today some very important people who educated me and, I know, many of you in this House about the importance of this historic moment: Olexander Danyleiko, the Consul General of Ukraine; Oleh Romanyshyn, the president of the League of Ukrainian Canadians; Mr. Volodymyr Paslavskyi, the executive director of LUC; Borys Mykhaylets, from the LUC executive; Taras Paslavskyi, from the LUC executive; Mr. Orest Steciw, the Holodomor projects coordinator; Chrystyna Bidiak, the president of the League of Ukrainian-Canadian Women; Halyna Vynnyk, from the LUCW executive; Mr. Andrew Gregorovich, Ukrainian National Federation; Oksana Prociuk Ciz, from the Council of Ukrainian Credit Unions of Canada; Mr. Paul Grod, the president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress; Mr. Marc Shwec, the president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress of Toronto; Valentyna Kuryliw and Mr. Eugene Yakovitch from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress of Toronto famine genocide committee; and Allan Rewak.

I got through every one of those names and I know I didn’t do them justice, but we want to welcome them to our assembly today.

I would also like to bring our attention to the fact that I was very fortunate to meet the First Lady of Ukraine. Her Excellency Kateryna Yushchenko honoured me with an award on November 27, 2008. I explained to her when they gave it to me, “Please give this back to your people.” That says it all to me.

I would also like to point out that on June 5, 2007, Borys Wrzesnewszkyj, the Member of Parliament for

Etobicoke Centre, played an important part by introducing to the House of Commons in Ottawa a private member’s bill, C-450, the Ukrainian Holodomor-Genocide Remembrance Day Act, that started the discussion. I would also like to honour and thank the Manitoba MP, James Bezan, whose private member’s bill was passed on May 29, 2008, so that every fourth Saturday in November of each year is recognized as Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (“Holodomor”) Memorial Day across Canada.

I want to quote from a booklet that has been produced by the Ukrainian community. Here’s the first quote: “I address you on behalf of a nation that lost about 10 million people as a result of the Holodomor genocide.... We insist that the world learn the truth about all crimes against humanity. This is the only way we can ensure that criminals will no longer be emboldened by indifference.” That’s a quote from Viktor Yushchenko, the President of Ukraine.

Here is another quote from the booklet: “Children comprised one third of all of the Holodomor victims in Ukraine. Large numbers of children after that were orphaned and became homeless.”

Here’s one that I know my friend Frank Klees would relish, not because it’s a bad thing but because it represents something he’s trying to do: “I speak of a horrendous crime that was committed in cold blood by the rulers of that period. The memories of this tragedy must guide the feelings and actions of Ukrainians.” It was an address by Pope John Paul II to the Ukrainians on November 23, 2003, on the 70th commemoration of the Holodomor.

I think there are going to be some fabulous words spoken today, and I understand why we say them. The third reason why I think it’s important for us to discuss this topic: It’s not something new; it’s something that we have to continue to do, and that is to speak of the unspeakable. Those who knew were forced not to tell or participated in holding back the truth. Those days need to be removed.

I’m honoured to speak today on our private member’s bill, Bill 147. First, I wish to thank and acknowledge my former intern Matt; my intern who just moved to the opposition, Emma; my LA, Susan Ho; and my EA, Chris Yaccato, for their support, dedication and hard work in presenting this bill. I’d like to thank them, all of them, including the introduced guests, for bringing the depth of this issue to my attention and to my knowledge.

For many here today, in particular the Holodomor survivors, there is no need to state the bill’s significance and obvious conclusion. We know that the survivors have bitter memories, tearful memories, many recollections of personal tragedy. You will recall people you knew, family and friends who died, entire communities that no longer exist. Now, across the years, you have to have your grief brought back to you. Little boys and girls who are now in their later years still cry at the name Holodomor.

Today, and every day, we pay tribute to those survivors and especially those who died. The second reading

of this bill is important for those who experienced the famine, but it's just as important for those who don't know about famine, who don't know about the tyranny of oppression. Too many Ontarians have no personal experience of forced, man-made famine or tyranny and no way of knowing the anguish that is associated with it. Unfortunately, we do know that there are some Ontarians who do understand that. They've lived through that circumstance.

For many of my colleagues and those who are watching at home, the Holodomor is unfamiliar as a human tragedy. But you've heard the name Joseph Stalin. Joseph Stalin did this. His followers did this. It's undeniable. What I learned over the last year or so—those who were doing the research in locked archives to hide the truth unlocked the door and began to tell us the actual plan to wipe a people out, the formation of the collectives, which brought me stories that I find the most reprehensible, about children.

Parents of those children sent them out to try to find food. Those children would be found in ditches, legs as thin as fingers, bloated stomachs, outreaching cheeks, never to be seen again, lying dead and alone in a ditch. Other unspeakable moments took place; most of us, when we have done our research, realize how catastrophic this was. Children in the collectives who could hold a few grains in their hands that wouldn't fill a shot glass would disappear and never be seen again. Adults were shot on the spot if they dared try to take some of that grain to feed their family. But they risked it. And for those who did receive a ration, they would often save other people's lives by thinning out what they were getting for their family. That tells me of the humanity that was in existence inside of the insanity. All of this took place in 1932-33 with a regime that kept it quiet, and those who knew didn't tell anybody.

It is time. It's time for each and every one of us to educate not only ourselves, but to stand up and work with these fine men and women to say that the world must know. I honour them, I praise them and I thank them for the work that they continue to do to ensure that we never allow this to happen again. Have you heard that before: "Let us never let this happen again"? How many times do we have to hear that before we learn that we must respect each other, that we must never use power in a way that allows 10 million people to be starved to death on purpose?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

1520

Mr. Frank Klees: Let me at the outset extend a warm welcome to the guests from the Ukrainian community who were introduced by my colleague from Brant. It is wonderful to have you here. You represent the very essence of this bill that we're debating today.

It is a distinct honour for me to join in this debate. I have the privilege to co-sponsor this bill with my colleagues the member for Brant and the member for Parkdale-High Park. The fact that members from all

three political parties in this Parliament have joined together to co-sponsor this bill is indicative of the historical importance of this initiative. It's only right that we unanimously and formally acknowledge the horrific Ukrainian genocide of 1933-34.

By way of this bill, we will entrench in Ontario law a day, which is the last Saturday in November of each year, on which the world joins with the government of Ontario, the people of Ontario and the people of Ukraine in commemorating the more than 10 million victims of that horrific genocide. The Holodomor is for the Ukrainian people what the Holocaust is for the Jewish people and the 1915 Genocide is for Armenians: a tragedy of unfathomable proportions that traumatized an entire nation leaving its people with deep social, psychological, political and demographic scars that Ukraine bears to this day.

Holodomor Memorial Day will provide an opportunity for us all to reflect and to educate the current and future generations, in this province and abroad, about the enduring lessons of this genocide and the totalitarian and inhumane system that caused it. This day will also provide an opportunity to reflect on other instances of the systemic destruction of peoples, human rights issues and the diverse reality of our society in Ontario and Canada today.

In passing this bill into law, the Ontario Legislature would follow in the footsteps of the Parliaments of Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Georgia and Estonia. In 2003, the Congress of the United States of America acknowledged the Holodomor as genocide, quoting the 1988 US Congress Commission on the Ukrainian Famine official report: "Joseph Stalin and those around him committed genocide against Ukrainians in 1932-33."

In May of last year, and in the presence of Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, the Parliament of Canada passed Bill C-459. It was passed into law acknowledging the Holodomor as genocide and established Holodomor Memorial Day.

In 2003, the Senate of Australia recognized the Holodomor as "one of the most heinous acts of genocide in history." And in the words of the Speaker of the Parliament of Ukraine in 2005, Alexander Moroz, "The issue is clear to me. I need not refer to the United Nations definitions for in my own village, more than half of the inhabitants perished. I consider that a genocide."

The American Holodomor scholar James Mace had this to say about the horrific origin of this genocide: "For Stalin to have complete centralized power in his hands, he found it necessary to physically do away with Ukraine and things Ukrainian as such. The calculation was very simple, very primitive: no people, therefore, no separate country, and thus, no problem. Such a policy is genocide in the classic sense of the word."

Enforced starvation in Ukraine reached its peak in 1933 when an estimated 25,000 persons died every single day. As a result of the Holodomor, one quarter of the entire population of Soviet Ukraine was exterminated. In late spring 1933, over 300,000 homeless children were

recorded in the Kiev region alone. Since orphanages and shelters were already overcrowded, most of these children died on the streets as a result of starvation and disease.

A characteristic shared by all genocides is the denial by the perpetrators and their supporters that the genocides ever occurred, notwithstanding even the eyewitness accounts of the families of the victims. That's why this occasion here is so important, because it is an admission that there has been a denial, and thanks to those survivors who were passionate to ensure that the world would remember and the truth would be told in places like this and Legislatures throughout the world, there is an awakening to that reality and, more importantly, a commitment that it should never, ever happen again.

Stalin and his Soviet government took careful steps to prevent news of the Ukrainian famine from leaking out to the west. There were even western journalists who acted as apologists for Stalinism and who joined with the Soviet regime in denying what was occurring in Ukraine in 1933-34. However, there was one exception in the person of Gareth Jones, a well-known and highly respected journalist of the time. I'd like to take the opportunity to focus on the heroism of this man who first made public to his international audience the existence of the Holodomor in Ukraine.

Gareth Jones was born in Wales in 1905; his mother was a tutor of the children of Arthur Hughes, whose father was a steel industrialist who founded what is today the modern city of Donetsk in Ukraine. His mother's stories about Ukraine inspired Gareth with a desire to visit Ukraine. Years later, in 1930, he did that as the foreign adviser to British Prime Minister David Lloyd George. Gareth Jones toured Ukraine again in 1933 and on March 29 of that year, he issued his famous press release that was published by many newspapers, including the New York Evening Post and the Manchester Guardian, describing what he experienced. I want to quote from his article:

"I walked along through villages and 12 collective farms. Everywhere was the cry, 'There is no bread. We are dying.' ... I tramped through the black earth region because that was once the richest farmland and because the correspondents had been forbidden to go there to see for themselves what is happening....

"I stayed overnight in a village where there used to be 200 oxen and where there are now six. The peasants were eating the cattle fodder and had only a month's supply left. They told me that many had already died of hunger. Two soldiers came to arrest a thief. They warned me against travel at night, as there were too many 'starving' desperate men.

"'We are waiting for death,' was my welcome, 'but see, we still have our cattle fodder. Go farther south. There they have nothing. Many houses are empty of people already dead,' they cried."

Gareth Jones's report was not welcomed by most of the international media at that time, the result of sympathy with the Soviet regime of the day.

On March 31 the New York Times published a denial of Jones's statement, written by Walter Duranty under the headline "Russians Hungry, But Not Starving."

"Russian and foreign observers in the country could see no grounds for predictions of disaster," the rebuttal came. But on May 13, Gareth Jones published a strong rebuttal to Duranty in the New York Times, standing by his report. He wrote, "Censorship has turned journalists into masters of euphemism and understatement. Hence, they give 'famine' the polite name of 'food shortage,' and 'starving to death' is softened down to read as 'widespread mortality from diseases due to malnutrition.'"

It's important to add here that on September 26, 1933, Walter Duranty, despite his public denial of the famine, privately admitted to William Strang in the British embassy in Moscow, "It is quite possible that as many as 10 million people may have died directly or indirectly from lack of food in the Soviet Union during the past year."

Why the denial? We don't have an answer for that, but what we do have an answer for is why we are doing what we're doing here today, and that is to ensure that it would never happen again.

This bill honours the victims of Holodomor, it honours the memory of Gareth Jones and others like him, and it honours the memory of those who resisted Stalin's terror, especially the leader of the Ukrainian insurgent army, General Roman Shukhevych, who fell in the struggle against Stalinism 59 years ago today. It also honours the enduring struggle of the Ukrainian people for freedom.

1530

This bill honours the relatives of my executive assistant, Alex Roman, as well, including his great-uncle Theodore, who died in the Holodomor; his uncle Leo, who spent 10 years in Siberia for seeking to intervene on behalf of victims of the Holodomor; and his grandparents, Reverend Father John and Irene, who ministered to victims.

I want to acknowledge Alex Roman for his contribution to this debate through his thorough research, and for sharing with me his very personal insight into the Holodomor and the need for us all to acknowledge and to remember.

I join with all members in this House in calling on the government of Ontario to declare Holodomor Memorial Day in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's both a pleasure and a privilege to be able to stand on this historic day.

First I want to welcome our distinguished guests, who have worked so hard for this day and who have finally been successful. Dobroho dnia. Welcome.

I want to thank my colleagues Dave, the member from Brant, and Frank, the member from Newmarket-Aurora, for this historic moment in the House. This is the first time ever in Ontario's history that three parties have come together as one and supported a bill. I can think of no better bill for that to have happened; hopefully, it

won't be the last. But as the first, you also are witness to that historic moment.

This is a historic moment primarily because, finally, a very ugly silence has been broken. A historic silence has ceased. Voices have been raised, not only here but, as the member from Brant discussed, all around the world, and finally here, to say, "This happened." This happened.

But the work isn't finished yet, because there are still Holodomor deniers out there. It is still denied in certain circles. I remember, as a young woman—always a member of the New Democratic Party, always a social democrat—brushing shoulders with Communists back then who would be working on various issues with us. They denied it, and they supported the actions of Joseph Stalin, even after we knew about the gulag, even after we knew about the Holodomor. That denial continues.

I want to make the point that this is not about Ukrainians versus Russians. This is not about the Russian people. This is about the Russian government of a period, the government of Joseph Stalin, a totalitarian dictatorship. That's what that government was. Despite what they called themselves, that's what that government was.

It's interesting to me as a Christian, as well, when I have debates with atheists about genocide and they talk about all the problems of the world that have been caused by people of faith. I always say to them that the worst of genocide has been committed by atheists: by Hitler, by Stalin, by Pol Pot—the list goes on.

Today I also think about a journalist in a different genocide, a Norwegian socialist who went to Cambodia while Pol Pot was literally actively killing; the killing fields were ongoing. The journalist was taken and whisked around by government officials and came back with a report: "It's wonderful here. It's wonderful here. Nothing is wrong."

The member from Newmarket–Aurora spoke about the number of western journalists who went to Ukraine in the years 1932–33 and came back. One of them, who will go unnamed, a Pulitzer Prize winner, came back and said, "Nothing's wrong here. It's wonderful here." He as well was whisked around by government officials, shown only what they wanted him to see, never seeing the truth.

What was the truth? The truth was that 10 million people were starved to death in a planned famine that was politically motivated. It was designed to break the spirit of the Ukrainian people. It was designed to eliminate the Ukrainian people. That's what it was: 10 million people, 25,000 people a day—many of them, as you heard already, children; children, many of them—were starving to death when their barns, the barns of the Soviet Union, were filled with wheat. There was enough food to feed them, but the food was going to the animals in many instances and not to them—to the horses and not to the children. This horror, this planned horror, has been denied and has been silenced too long. The very bones of the victims cry out for this day to be acknowledged, for this genocide to be named.

When I first spoke about this bill, about my good friend whom I'll call Anne—and she was the one who

brought the horror of the Holodomor to me. She's a member of my congregation, a phenomenal community activist in Parkdale–High Park. She was involved in everything. She's an amazing woman. I did not know the story of Anne's childhood. I did not know what she had gone through as a child in Ukraine until she asked me, "Do you think God will forgive me?" I couldn't imagine what this sweet little old lady had ever done that she would ask for God's forgiveness, and she said, "I would ask for forgiveness for having tasted, having eaten, human flesh," because it was during the Holodomor that families who were trying to keep their children alive had to—they were driven to engage in cannibalism of those who had dropped by the wayside. This kind of horror, this poor woman lived through as a child. Imagine being confronted with that. I said, "Of course, Anne; God understands," and I believe God does understand. What God I don't think would understand is if we keep silent about it, if we do nothing about it, if we say nothing about it. So that's what this bill is meant to redress.

I feel a particular weight upon me, too, of course, as someone who now supports, and very vocally so, the plight of the Tibetan people, who are up against the same kind of totalitarian government that the Ukrainians were up against. The Tibetan people are coming up to the 50th anniversary of their circumstances. Imprisonment and killings go on; again, no western journalists go; again, nobody speaks about it. Again, it's not about the Chinese people; it's about the government they have. I always say to them, "There's hope. Despite the fact that you're a small voice in a big world against a big power, look: The wall came down. The Soviet Union, the Stalins of the world and all who supported them—they're over now. It's over. It's finished." So the voice of truth and the voice of freedom will come out. It will be heard, even if it takes a while. They take great, great comfort in the fact that, for example, Ukrainians finally are seeing justice done about that genocide so long ago.

You are an example to the world still—still—to those who deny oppression and who deny totalitarianism still. It still goes on; it's still happening. You are here as a witness against that, in the present, on behalf of those who suffered in the past, so I thank you. We all thank you for that.

Certainly, as a social democrat, when I look to those countries that we see as doing things better than we think we are doing in Ontario and Canada—countries like Sweden, Norway and Germany; certainly countries that have more of a social services network; countries that may call themselves socialist, even—I feel it is particularly incumbent upon social democrats to stand up and say, "We have nothing in common with that system; we have nothing in common with that government; that has nothing to do with the ideals and principles and values that we hold." It is incumbent upon us, and so I feel that weight as well, that we must say something.

Whenever ideology clouds humanity, this kind of horror happens. Whenever people refuse to see the human in front of them and see only a symbol in front of

them, this kind of horror can happen. Whenever humans don't accept, in all the humanity, each other, this kind of horror happens. In some small way, the joy of being part of a three-party bill, an all-party bill in this House, is our little way too of saying that we may be Liberals, we may be Conservatives, we may be NDP, but we are all humans and we see each other as such. When it comes to humanity, when it comes to suffering and when it comes to historic injustice, we can agree and we should agree, and we should move forward as one.

1540

It's these big questions where you really see the mettle of people. I'm proud today. I'm proud not just of my own team over here; I'm proud of all of us. I'm proud of Liberals. I'm proud of Progressive Conservatives. I'm proud of the New Democratic Party. I am mainly and mostly proud of our distinguished guests, and I'm proud of all of those like my friend Anne who spoke out, who finally told the truth about the horrors they had witnessed. It takes courage to tell the truth. It takes courage always and ever. Truth-tellers tend to do it in the face of no agreement. That's the historical reality. Those who did not tell the truth encouraged that horror to continue. Today, we're undoing a historic wrong, we're making history in this particular government of Ontario, and we're doing it for such a worthy cause.

I want to thank you; we all want to thank you for what you have brought about today. I want to thank my colleague from Brant and my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora. I want to thank all of those voices around the world that tell the truth and still tell the truth in their particular circumstances against totalitarianism, against the forced suffering of people, even when it isn't popular or easy to do so. Thank you all.

It's been a privilege, as I say, and a pleasure to finally get this bill before this House and, with any luck at all, passed very quickly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Before I start, I want to also welcome all the guests who are with us here in the gallery, and especially Dmytro Nebor and Luba Kaipainen. I'm not sure if they are here or not.

I'm privileged and honoured to stand up today among all my colleagues from both sides of the House to speak in support of Bill 61, An Act to proclaim Holodomor Memorial Day.

This bill is an historic bill, as has been mentioned, because for the first time ever in this place, a bill is being sponsored by three parties, all of us standing up together, united, to speak about an era, a dark era, that happened in our history; to stand up to speak about the dictatorship, to speak up against the killing of innocent people which ended the regime of Joseph Stalin. Ten million people perished, 25,000 on a daily basis, being killed for no reason except love of power. He loved himself so much, he loved his authority so much, he went and killed everyone who went against him. So today, we're standing up together—Liberal, Conservative and NDP—to say

no to all the dictatorships, to say no to all the killers on the whole globe, not in order to bring back the history, but to protect our present and also to make sure we have a bright future, a safe future for all of us.

Ladies and gentlemen, my friends, my colleagues, to all the people who are listening to us, today is a historic day because all of us stand united under one banner and under one direction against the killers, against dictatorship, and stand up for the lives of all the people from different faiths, from different religions, from different ethnic backgrounds, because all of us deserve to live in peace, dignity and respect.

Again, I want to congratulate my colleagues from Brant, from Newmarket–Aurora and from Parkdale–High Park for bringing this bill together to show the whole earth, to show Ontarians and Canadians that we are united against dictatorship.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Is there any further debate?

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: On behalf of myself and my colleague Jerry Ouellette, the two members of our caucus of Ukrainian descent, I would join in and, first of all, congratulate my friend David Levac for bringing this forth, An Act to proclaim Holodomor Memorial Day, which recognizes the victims of the Ukrainian genocide. It lifts the veil of secrecy that has lasted so long on Joseph Stalin's crime against humanity in murdering millions of Ukrainians. I congratulate and commend all members of the House to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to speak in support of Bill 147 and to support my colleagues on all sides of the House, the members from Brant, Parkdale–High Park and Newmarket–Aurora, who have brought this important debate to the floor of the Legislature once again.

Ukrainian communities around the world commemorate Holodomor Memorial Day on the fourth Saturday of November each and every year. If this act is passed, I look forward to the opportunity when we in Ontario will be able to stand along with those from the Ukrainian community and others who care about this most significant, important and tragic issue, to turn our minds and to move us one step forward in bringing greater light to these tragic circumstances, to raise awareness about what transpired in Ukraine.

As MPP for Etobicoke–Lakeshore, I want to pay tribute to the Ukrainian community in my riding, which is strong and vibrant and which has welcomed me with open arms. I want to acknowledge the work undertaken in raising this issue by the League of Ukrainian Canadians, the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, and Ukrainian Canadian communities across Ontario, including so many individuals who have told their personal stories, their families' stories, with the goal of helping all of us better understand, and ultimately to help us ensure that such a tragedy would never occur again.

To my colleagues around the House, to those from the community and the faces that I know well who have joined us here today, diakuyu, thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Is there any further debate?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I too want to join all the members of the House in our support of Bill 147. It's certainly a great privilege to be part of an all-party bill.

As I was doing my research into the Holodomor, I was taken aback by the absolute deliberateness and fierceness of what happened there. As I was reading, it said that the famine was even worse in the rural parts of Ukraine than it was in the cities. That goes totally against everything that most of us know about agriculture. I read that in 1933, 1.8 million tonnes of grain was shipped out of Ukraine. So it wasn't a case of there being a failure of a crop, like with the potato famine. This was very deliberate. This was taking the crop away from these people. As a farmer, I know that the farm families must have had to go into their fields and use the zeis—that's Dutch—to cut the grain and then put it into sheaths. The hunger and the internal drive to want to take some of that grain that is really your grain as a farmer—to have to steal your own grain so you could eat. I'm sure that Stalin must have had an incredible number of soldiers—the amount of manpower it would have taken to watch these farmers to make sure they didn't take some of that grain for themselves. It was so deliberate, so fierce. It's beyond what any of us can imagine because, like I say, for most of these people, the temptation—they would risk death, I think, to try and get a mouthful of grain. And that's a terrible, terrible, thing as a farmer and for anyone to have to do.

1550

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): The member for Mississauga East–Cooksville.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: First, I want to commend and support my good friend and colleague the member from Brant, Dave Levac, for this bill which commemorates victims of the man-made famine of Ukraine. This proposed bill is being brought forward by members of all three parties, and I commend the members from Newmarket–Aurora and Parkdale–High Park. We all understand that the emotional, psychological and physical pain, suffering and death that was inflicted on millions of Ukrainian women, children and men should be remembered and never allowed to happen again—never again.

My wife is of Ukrainian descent—her name is Christina Yaremczuk—and she and her family have shared with me their horrific stories of the Holodomor. I also have a large Ukrainian-Canadian constituency in my riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville. They're wonderful neighbours, friends, great citizens, volunteers, hard-working and strong people.

In the middle of my riding there is also a beautiful Ukrainian church, St. Mary's. St. Mary's hosts many different events. Last year they had an exhibit detailing the Holodomor, the man-made famine that killed 10

million Ukrainians through hunger. In that display there were pictures and words that were sad and disturbing of emaciated bodies, people with sunken eyes and hollowed faces. Like many other governments and non-government organizations around the world that have understood and declared the Holodomor a genocide, we in this Legislature have this opportunity to declare Holodomor Memorial Day on the fourth Saturday in November each year in Ontario.

I hope we do that here. I want to thank all our guests for all their work on this very important issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm pleased to rise as well in support of the bill. Everyone who has spoken in the House—when you hear what occurred, there is such an extraordinary and profound sadness that comes over you to think that such inhumanity would occur. Of course, we never want this to happen ever again in any community. This isn't an issue that belongs just to Ukraine or Ukrainians. It belongs to each and every one of us. We have a responsibility to ensure that it doesn't occur.

By passage of this bill, what we've done is say to the Ukrainian community that finally, "We believe you. We believe you, we believe this happened, and we are going to stand with you to make a difference." That's what this passage really means. We can make a difference on that particular day every year by reaching out and respecting the past for its legitimacy—it occurred—but most importantly, reaching out to the future through those children to teach them what we should never have done, as mankind, in the first place, so that they never, ever again accept what would happen, deny what would happen, or even encourage what might happen.

With the legitimacy of this bill, the people of Ontario are saying that we no longer, around the world, will accept this type of initiative that happened in the past or in the future. And to all Ukrainians—I'm of Ukrainian descent as well—we say that we'll stand up. We have the courage and the conviction, and we'll stand up and we'll stand beside you to make a difference in the future. That's what will happen every year on that very special day. That's where we can make a difference. So it's not just a day; it's the beginning of the future where we can reach out, where we can teach, where we can make a difference and ensure that this never, ever happens again. So I thank you.

You know, we have made history here today, with everyone in the House agreeing and supporting this bill. The sadness is that it took a little bit of time to do it, unfortunately, but the opportunity there was that we also had the chance to learn and to understand, so it had its benefits as well. I would just like to say thank you to each and every one of you because today we have made a difference.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): We thank all of those who took part in this very important debate. The time provided for private members' public business has expired—

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I think they have two minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Oh, I'm sorry. I beg your pardon. Mr. Levac, as the mover of the bill, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Dave Levac: Let me begin by thanking all of the members who spoke so eloquently and thanking them for their deep concern on an issue that cannot go away: the members from London–Fanshawe, Etobicoke–Lake-shore, Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, Mississauga East–Cooksville, Etobicoke Centre, Cambridge, and especially my friends from Newmarket–Aurora and Parkdale–High Park.

I offer you a quote, and I ask you to look this one up because it's an extremely important quote, germane to this issue but also to world events. Raphael Lemkin, a Jewish-Polish scholar who was the father of the 1948 UN Convention on Genocide, coined the term "genocide" and applied it to the destruction of the Ukrainian nation as follows: "This was not simply a case of mass murder. It was a case of genocide, of destruction, not of individuals only, but of a culture and a nation." All too often we are bombarded with reminders of the evil of humanity. I think many here would agree that while these events infuriate us, terrify us and make us weep, often we lack the knowledge to impart a successful course of action to prevent their continuation. Every great achievement of mankind has come with the expansion of knowledge and enlightenment. This expansion has all but eradicated, to a degree, slavery, encouraged the spread of democracy and connected millions across continents. The spread of knowledge will also one day stop examples of genocide like the one that occurred in Ukraine from 1932 to 1933, up to 10 million people. Perhaps the best way to acquire this knowledge is through commemoration. So through education and remembrance, Ontario can continue to be a beacon of hope, acceptance and freedom. Today we have an opportunity to further that cause.

I urge all of my colleagues to join me, the wonderful people who are here with us today, the 1.5 million Ukrainian community people from Canada and all Ukrainians around the world in supporting this bill and affirming our solidarity in opposition to tyranny and persecution for ourselves and our children and our children's children, that this cause can never be rested. For that reason, I ask for your support. Thank you. Diakuyu.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Thank you. The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT (PUPILS WITH DIABETES), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION (ÉLÈVES DIABÉTIQUES)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): We will deal first with ballot item number 73, private member's Bill 137, standing in the name of Mr. Martiniuk.

Mr. Martiniuk has moved second reading of Bill 137. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. We'll defer this motion until deferred votes.

MUNICIPALITIES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): We'll now deal with private member's notice of motion number 78, standing in the name of Mr. Sterling.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

Will all those in favour of the motion please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

Thank you. We'll defer this.

HOLODOMOR MEMORIAL DAY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE JOUR COMMÉMORATIF DE L'HOLODOMOR

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): We'll now deal with ballot item number 75, private member's Bill 147, standing in the names of Mr. Levac, Ms. DiNovo and Mr. Klees. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Mr. Levac, a recommendation on a committee?

Mr. Dave Levac: Yes. I wish the bill to be sent to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Agreed? Agreed.

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT (PUPILS WITH DIABETES), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION (ÉLÈVES DIABÉTIQUES)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): We will deal first with ballot item number 73, in the name of Mr. Martiniuk. Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1601 to 1606.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Mr. Martiniuk has moved second reading of Bill 137. Will all those in favour of the motion please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Chudleigh, Ted
Craitor, Kim
DiNovo, Cheri
Elliott, Christine
Hardeman, Ernie

Hudak, Tim
Jeffrey, Linda
Klees, Frank
Leal, Jeff
Marchese, Rosario

Martiniuk, Gerry
Sterling, Norman W.
Witmer, Elizabeth

Ayes

Balkissoon, Bas
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Chudleigh, Ted
Craitor, Kim
DiNovo, Cheri

Elliott, Christine
Hardeman, Ernie
Hudak, Tim
Klees, Frank
Marchese, Rosario

Martiniuk, Gerry
Sterling, Norman W.
Witmer, Elizabeth

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Will all those opposed to the motion please rise.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Will all those opposed to the motion please rise.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Best, Margaret
Brotten, Laurel C.
Cansfield, Donna H.
Colle, Mike
Dhillon, Vic

Dickson, Joe
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Jaczek, Helena
Kular, Kuldip
Mangat, Amrit
Moridi, Reza
Pendergast, Leeanna
Phillips, Gerry

Qaadri, Shafiq
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Takhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Arthurs, Wayne
Best, Margaret
Brotten, Laurel C.
Cansfield, Donna H.
Colle, Mike
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Flynn, Kevin Daniel

Fonseca, Peter
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Kular, Kuldip
Leal, Jeff
Mangat, Amrit
Moridi, Reza
Pendergast, Leeanna
Phillips, Gerry

Qaadri, Shafiq
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Sousa, Charles
Takhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
The ayes are 13; the nays are 26.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): We'll open the doors for 30 seconds.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
The ayes are 13; the nays are 27.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): All matters relating to private members' public business now being completed, I do call orders of the day.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Shall the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until Monday, March 9, at 10:30 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1611.

MUNICIPALITIES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Mr. Sterling has moved private member's notice of motion number 78. Will all those in favour of the motion please rise.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Broten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture
		Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
		Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
		Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
		Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Orazietti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
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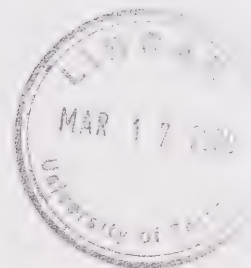
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Première session, 39^e législature

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Monday 9 March 2009

Lundi 9 mars 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 9 March 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 9 mars 2009

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the non-denominational prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Julia Munro: I would ask the members of the House to help me in welcoming friends and family of page Rachel Trow: Lois Fallis, Glenna Phair, Taylor Lipsett, Dylan Trow, Phil Trow, Betty Fallis-Trow, Alison Gold, Megan Gold, Ryan Gold, Josh Carr and Murray Fallis. Welcome to the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and page Reed Bell, we would like to welcome his grandmother, Doreen Bell, and his grandfather, Bob Bell. They'll be here this morning in the west members' gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

On behalf of page Emily Wilson and the member from Wellington-Halton Hills, I would like to welcome her nana, Ellen Dolan, and her uncle, Kevin Dolan, sitting in the west members' gallery.

Also, some guests of mine: Sharon and David Pell, from Fingal, and Foti Karkavilas, from Montreal, in the public gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

There being no further introductions, it is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Premier. Whenever the Premier talks of economics these days, he's sure to use the word "global." It's a see-through attempt to shift the blame, a tactic that the Premier has honed to a fine art. Of course the recession is global; everyone knows that. But that doesn't mean the Premier is powerless. He needs to take some responsibility.

BC, Alberta, PEI and Newfoundland are all faring better than Ontario, and economists predict that they will recover quickly. Meanwhile, we have lost almost 300,000 manufacturing jobs while the Premier has sat on his hands. This has been happening since 2004, and yet he has shown no urgency and no recognition of the serious-

ness of this issue. His lack of foresight has left us unprepared and led us to a deeper recession than we might otherwise have expected.

Premier, why are you satisfied with being last place in Canada?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: As usual, I welcome the question, and as usual, I differ with the interpretation of the facts and the nature of the cause of the challenge before us. I agree with my colleague insofar as he recognizes that the recession is worldwide, but I disagree with his inference that somehow it started here at Queen's Park in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

We've been doing a number of things for many years to lend further strength to the Ontario economy. It's just that we fail to receive the support from the opposition as we pursue those important initiatives.

For example, back in 2006, our budget was principally focused on investing heavily in infrastructure. We have hundreds of projects under way right now creating thousands and thousands of jobs right now, when we need them. It would have been nice to have the support of the opposition at that point in time, but fortunately we moved ahead notwithstanding, in the interests of the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's that kind of empty rhetoric that has led Ontario into have-not status. The fact is that the Premier squandered the good times, and in so doing has left us unprepared for the bad times. He raised taxes to record levels, levels that would make Bob Rae blush. He spent wildly and recklessly, including \$1 million to the Toronto Cricket Club. He dismissed us when we warned him that there was a looming recession and called us pessimists. And he spoke about a "small contraction"—a small contraction indeed. "This too shall pass," he said.

When the rest of Canada turns the economic corner, Ontario will still be struggling with the recession, because even now you won't take the necessary steps to ease the transition. Premier, are you frozen in fear, or are you stumped as to what to do?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, Speaker, I appreciate the observations, but I disagree with him. The official opposition has for some time now said that they are very concerned about the size of the deficit that we are projecting. But I want you to understand some of the demands that they have been putting forward, notwithstanding their concerns about the deficit.

We've been keeping track of their questions since we returned to the House. They have asked, so far, 25

“spend” questions. They are asking that we spend more on everything from an airport to adult literacy programs, a lumber mill, MRI machines, a bridge, several questions on hospitals and mental health. These are all good issues. They are very debatable and important concerns advanced on behalf of their constituents. But you can’t have it both ways. You can’t say we have to cut public services and invest in them at the same time.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The Liberal plan is simply not working. I wonder if the 1,500 recently laid-off steelworkers in Hamilton think your plan is working. I wonder if the 1,200 recently laid-off workers at Chrysler in Windsor think your plan is working. I wonder if the unemployed miners and workers in Sudbury think your plan is working.

It seems to me that the only people convinced this plan is working are the Liberal lapdogs that sit behind the Premier in this House, yet the stubborn Premier refuses to change course. Premier, are you ready to take ownership of the state of Ontario’s economy? Are you willing to accept some blame for all these job losses? If not, Premier, why are you still leading this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We take full responsibility for pursuing initiatives on behalf of the people of Ontario.

In particular, my colleague mentions that families are suffering as a result of job losses. That is absolutely true. Perhaps they are possessed of some special magic over there that would prevent any of that from happening anywhere in the province of Ontario, but we on this side of the House are not. We have to deal with reality.

We are going to continue to pursue our five-point plan. One of the most important aspects of that plan is to develop the skills and strengths of our workforce, and I’m happy that today we will be announcing that once again we have increased the high school graduation rate. It has gone from—

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It was 75% last year; it’s 77% this year. It was 68% in 2003.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: —68% to 77%, which means we are having many thousands more young people graduating from high school every year.

1040

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier: Your outdated tax-and-spend policies have brought Ontario to have-not status and chased some 300,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs from our province.

According to the Ontario Real Estate Association, your mandatory energy audit will have serious implications for small business in the province of Ontario. In fact, OREA says, “Energy audits and corresponding retrofits will hurt the competitiveness of Ontario business at a time when they can least afford it.” This act will increase energy rates and it will cause problems for small

business with the mandatory audits. Isn’t this just kicking small business when they’re already facing a downturn?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to say to the honourable member, I’d be very happy, as I said to the critic from that party on matters of energy, to discuss any items in the proposed Green Energy Act on which they might have suggestions for amendment. But I want to make it very clear that the mandatory home energy audits would apply only to single-family residences, and therefore small businesses would not be implicated by any such audit.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: To the Premier on his job-killing policies: Not only are they facing new energy audits, but small businesses in the agriculture and landscaping industries say your pesticide ban is going to kill jobs this summer. Landscape Ontario says that more than 20,000 lawn care jobs are in jeopardy and lack of a phase-in will have serious economic consequences. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture says that 40,000 farming families and sale of their products will suffer from an already unwarranted negative impact brought about by this bill.

Why are you pushing forward these unwarranted, job-killing regulations during this unprecedented economic crisis?

Hon. George Smitherman: At the beginning of the honourable member’s supplementary, he repeated what he had suggested in his earlier question, even though in a very, very clear way, I indicated to the honourable member that the information that he was presenting was not consistent with the plan. Accordingly, I would like to reiterate to the honourable member that energy audits are for homes and not for small businesses. More to the point, they are actually an opportunity to enhance the understanding of the circumstances related to energy use in the home.

We think also that on the idea of retrofit, there are examples for people, with support from the government, to be investing in bringing their homes forward to a lower overall energy use which actually can impact their operational costs. So we do see advantages associated with it, and we would very much welcome sitting down with the honourable member to brief him on those things or discuss other matters related to this bill with the critic of that party.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I think the minister knows that those are the quotes from the Ontario Real Estate Association. So we’re jamming up, under Dalton McGuinty, the real estate market.

Your pesticides bill coming down this summer is going to chase out 20,000 lawn care jobs and impact on small businesses and agriculture. The Association of Canadian Search, Employment and Staffing Services, ACSESS, said about your temp agency bill, Bill 139, “Some of the new rules ... will significantly damage an

industry employing 300,000 people a year in the province of Ontario.” They add, “The new legislation will create unfair and more onerous employer obligations for staffing services industry employers in Ontario compared to any other industry or geographic sector in North America.”

You’re attacking small business with higher energy rates, you’re attacking small business with new pesticide regulations. Isn’t it time to give small businesses a break in Ontario so they can create some private sector jobs again?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I say to the member opposite is that this government wants to ensure that we protect our most vulnerable workers. I say to that member, you should speak to the member from Sarnia from your party, because here’s what he had to say. He said, “In general, we are” very “supportive of the government’s efforts to offer protection to workers in temporary agencies.... I would have to wonder why the government would announce changes to the regulations today, December 9, that don’t come into effect until January 2,” 2009. Actually, that member wanted us to move even quicker, I say to the member.

But here’s what we are doing: We’re making sure that these vulnerable workers are not treated unfairly, that they’re not prevented from accessing permanent jobs. We think this is good for our economy. Eleven per cent of the workforce today works in temp work; we want to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question. The leader of the third party.

Applause.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Premier: I’ve spent the last six months travelling the province of Ontario. I’ve met thousands of workers who have lost their jobs at the pulp and paper mill in Kenora, the auto plant in Windsor, the parts factory in Mississauga and the steel mill in Hamilton. Premier, these workers and their families are scared. They’ve worked hard, but now they worry about keeping a roof over their heads and food on the table. With all the tools this government has at hand and at its disposal, how could the Premier let this happen?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I welcome the question from the newly elected leader of the NDP. I know she recognizes what a wonderful honour it is to serve as leader of her party, and I wish her the very best.

With respect to the question, I know that the honourable member also recognizes the worldwide nature of this particular economic challenge, and I know she will want to cast her mind back to the things we have done and continue to do, as a government, both in anticipation of and in the face of this particular recession. We continue to invest heavily in infrastructure, and that creates jobs right now as we need them; we continue to cut business taxes to enhance the competitiveness of Ontario busi-

nesses; we continue to strengthen our workforce; we continue to create new job training opportunities for people who have lost their jobs; and we continue to form partnerships with businesses and workers so that we can move forward together.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: These Ontario workers and their families know very well that we are in the midst of a terrible recession, and they are prepared to make the necessary sacrifices and do their part. In fact, we just have to look at the 10,000 General Motors workers and what they’re doing. They’re accepting frozen wages, reducing their pensions and getting fewer benefits. Before flowing more money, though, they want to know, will this government demand the same sacrifices from the high-flying corporate executives who got us into this mess in the first place?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The leader of the NDP raises a very important subject, which is the future of the auto sector in the province of Ontario. There is much at stake here. We understand that it is a fully integrated North American industry. We know that we have to move closely with initiatives pursued by Washington. We are, at present, working with the federal government and negotiating with GM and Chrysler in particular. We understand there are 400,000 jobs at stake in the province of Ontario; it’s a powerful contributor to our gross domestic product. We will continue to pursue those initiatives.

I’m pleased to hear of the news that came from the CAW workers. We have always known, notwithstanding commentary to the contrary, that they would be making concessions. We are pleased to hear they made those concessions, and we think that facilitates us reaching a final conclusion with the auto sector.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think everybody would agree that that financial assistance needs to flow, but we need to know that there are going to be strings attached to that assistance. Jobs have to stay in this province. The government has failed in the past on those kinds of guarantees. Why should the workers and their families trust you now to get it right?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would argue that Canadian auto workers—workers in the sector broadly, beyond the manufacturers—understand that we’ve been in their corner for five years now. Working together, we’ve now succeeded in becoming the single largest auto producer in North America. We are proud of that achievement. I think they also recognize that we have, by means of partnerships with various manufacturers, secured new plants and new jobs. They also understand that the future of the auto sector is going to look a little bit smaller here in Ontario, as it is across North America. Our commitment is to preserve our share of that sector and do everything we can to build a solid foundation so that we can launch a brighter and stronger future on a go-forward basis.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: You need to look no further than Stelco in Hamilton, my own hometown. It received \$150 million just three years ago, and it issued 2,100 pink slips last week. There were no job guarantees then. Will there be job guarantees? That's what we want to know: Will there be job guarantees the next time that money flows?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We will do everything we can to lend as much security, stability and guarantee to jobs, but I can't say for certain that we can enter into arrangements that will absolutely guarantee that we will have a certain number of jobs on a permanent basis; that's just not the world that we live in. I note that when it comes to the steel industry, there has been a dramatic drop in global demand for that. They have experienced closures in Michigan, Illinois and Minnesota.

What I can say is that we bring tremendous goodwill, determination and an earnest desire to find ways to build a stronger steel sector for the future. We understand the angst and pain that those families are experiencing at present. I know it's particularly pronounced in this member's community, but we will continue to work with them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The world we live in is one where real people, real families, real communities are experiencing a severe impact. A typical steelworker's salary at US Steel's Hamilton plant: about \$65,000—\$1,250 or so a week. That pays for mortgages, that pays for a roof over the heads of families, that pays for kids to go to school.

When you forked over \$150 million three years ago, how could you possibly have given the company a free hand to wreak havoc on our community?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: That money, as I recall, was for assisting with pensions and pension protection. We thought that was important, and that's why we pursued those negotiations.

I know that people in Hamilton are a little concerned these days about their future. I want to assure them that I have spoken with the mayor and that he has expressed to me some of his concerns and some of the support that he's looking for; we're carefully considering that, and we will build on our record of support for Hamilton. It is there for people to see. We've always found a way to lend assistance to the people of Hamilton. I believe that Hamilton has a bright future, built on its single strongest asset: its people.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm simply sharing with the Premier the voices that I've heard over the last six months during the leadership race, the voices of hard-working women and men who believe that if government is going to dole out our money, it should go to protecting

and creating jobs right here, not elsewhere. Above all, the voices said to me, "When you return to Queen's Park, ask the government, 'When 300,000 good-paying jobs disappeared and countless pensions were threatened, where was our government here in Ontario when we needed it?'"

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to remind my honourable colleague that when it comes to Stelco, we provided money on behalf of Ontario taxpayers in support of those pensions. I want to also remind my honourable colleague that in her new capacity, she inherits a legacy that comes with her party. I want to remind the leader that the NDP brought in a rule that exempted Stelco from making—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The NDP changed the rule so that Stelco was no longer required to pay into its pension plan. It was considered too big to fail. It was at real risk, and that's why, on behalf of Ontario taxpayers, we made that contribution. But they got into that trouble because they changed—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Premier. Premier, as you prepare to hand out millions of dollars in taxpayers' money to the auto companies, there is a worry, especially amongst our caucus, that this bailout will not come with conditions. After all, your government is not known for its careful handling in the spending of other people's money, and you can read into that the Toronto Cricket club and their \$1-million gift.

Premier, can you tell us today what conditions will accompany the taxpayers' support of the auto industry, and will that hard-earned taxpayer money be protected in your deals?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Yes. The conditions are that the industry and the companies are viable. They have to establish that they're viable. Secondly, the agreement has to be in the taxpayers' interests, and that's going to include a footprint—a level of production—in the province of Ontario. From the beginning, that's the position of Canada and Ontario, and it will continue to be.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Minister, that's rather a vague answer. It would be nice to have some specifics. How are you going to protect the taxpayers' money? You didn't do a very good job protecting it when you handed out \$1 million to the cricket club. For instance, have you indicated that the legacy funds may also be on the table and some of those costs will be covered by the people of Ontario? Is that true? Will this bailout include pension support?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The member talks about the investments the government has made, and I note that he

didn't complain when the government made a loan commitment of \$10 million to Roxul Inc. in Milton in the member's riding, in addition to the literally hundreds of millions of dollars that have been invested directly in companies either by way of loans or by way of grants in all circumstances involving a wide array of conditions to ensure that the dollars that are being invested are accountable and in the best interests of taxpayers.

I say to the member as well: This was a member who, time and time again, stood up and said, "Boy, those unions. They'd better be making some concessions. I'm worried about that." Time after time, the Premier of Ontario and this government said that we were confident the CAW would do that, and that's exactly what the CAW did.

NUCLEAR ENERGY

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Toronto—Danforth.

Applause.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: You're a kind group. George, you, too.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Question?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker, for your indulgence.

To the Minister of Energy: Minister, recently you admitted that the final cost of nuclear mega-projects "very rarely looks like the price we talked about at the beginning." You said, "Prices go up. Yes, prices go up. These projects tend to get more expensive over time." It's an understatement, but still you said that.

You must know, Minister, that every nuclear plant in Ontario has gone over budget. You must also know that every Ontario household is spending about \$100 a year to cover the debt from reactors built over 30 years ago. So why are you about to saddle Ontarians with yet another huge nuclear tab?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to say to my constituent that we congratulate him on his run for the leadership. I can only say, as a Torontonians, that I continue to be disappointed that the front row of the NDP benches doesn't seem to be a place where Torontonians can ever be situated.

On the matter at hand, with respect to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Kenora—Rainy River.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Mr. Speaker, I'm overcome.

Hon. George Smitherman: That's putting it lightly.

To the honourable member's question, I think it would be helpful if, in his question, he also acknowledged that today in the province of Ontario just about 50% of all the electricity that we're gaining benefit from is emission-free nuclear power. We think that since Ontario has, for about 40 years, been relying substantially on nuclear power, we should make sure as we go forward that we have a good fleet. Therefore, we're looking for oppor-

tunities to renew the nuclear fleet in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I don't know which diversion to go after, George, but I'll go with a third question.

As the minister knows, nuclear energy is not reliable; seven reactors were shut down in 1998 alone. He knows there's no safe way to store nuclear waste for a million years.

There have been reports that the Ontario government might buy shares in Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. as a way of covering cost overruns for new nuclear plants. Will the minister today promise Ontarians that the government of Ontario will not take a stake in AECL and will not dump a single penny from billion-dollar cost overruns onto the taxpayer or the ratepayer? Will you make that commitment today?

1100

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to say to my honourable friend that the commitment we have on behalf of the ratepayers and the taxpayers in the province of Ontario, associated with what is admittedly a very large procurement, is to do our very best to create a circumstance where the vendors are under pressure to offer us their best deal.

We are evaluating bids that have come in from three companies which wish to provide for the province of Ontario two new nuclear reactors, which will be situated at Darlington and operated by Ontario Power Generation.

Over the next several months, through very serious negotiation, we will land on a preferred proponent for the purpose of these projects to be located at Darlington.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question today is for the Minister of Transportation. A top priority for our government is to get people out of their single-occupied cars and onto public transit. We have seen this with the Metrolinx regional transportation plan for the greater Toronto area and Hamilton, we have seen it with the Ontario bus replacement program for municipalities across the province and we have seen it with gas tax funding.

I am pleased with this government commitment to funding public transit through initiatives such as gas tax funding. In my riding, London—Fanshawe, and I am sure it's the same in many ridings across the province of Ontario, public transit investments such as gas tax funding will allow us to spend less time waiting for transit, provide more accessible transit and enjoy increased levels of service.

On Friday, London saw an additional \$9.5 million in gas tax funding for this year—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Good question. I'd like to thank the member for that question.

This past Friday, the province announced funding allocations for the fifth year of the gas tax program—

\$321 million is being distributed to 89 transit systems, serving 111 communities across the province.

The city of London did in fact receive more than \$9.5 million in gas tax funding, bringing the total gas tax funding shared with London to almost \$39 million since our government initiated the program in 2004.

In the past, the gas tax funding for London has meant: a new terminal at Fanshawe College, increases in service hours, new service areas, the implementation of smart bus technology and purchasing two expansion buses.

I look forward to seeing how this year's funding will help London and communities—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I appreciate the minister's answer, and I also look forward to the improvements that will be made to London's bus transit system because of this gas tax funding.

Minister, I know that not only London received funding. Another 110 municipalities received the same funding. Minister, this funding is going to go to additional expenses for the bus terminals and to increase the hours. This investment will allow London transit to expand their services for the people of London and surrounding area.

Minister, I want to ask you a question. This investment is not just about the municipalities which have—

Interjections.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Those people, Mr. Speaker—

Interjection: I didn't do nothing. I'm sitting here. What are you looking at me for?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Those people do not believe in public transit. Anyway, can you tell me, Minister, what you have for the people who have a transit system?

Hon. James J. Bradley: The McGuinty government has delivered on its commitment to use gas tax revenues as a source of long-term sustainable funding for public transit.

Since 2004, we have committed over \$1.3 billion in gas tax funding to Ontario municipalities. Ridership increases show our investments are working. We have seen an increase of 102 million passenger trips, removing 85 million car trips from our roads.

For those municipalities without transit systems, we are committed to supporting municipal road and bridges projects. Since 2003, the government has provided \$2.3 million in funding to support bridge and road projects across the province. That includes a \$400-million road and bridge fund announced in the 2008 budget and the \$1.1 billion announced under the Investing in Ontario Act in August 2008 for municipal infrastructure that can be used for roads, bridges, transit and other—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. Premier, earlier, in your answer to the third party leader, you mentioned preserving the jobs in Ontario's share in our auto sector.

Premier, the bids are in for new build nuclear in Ontario. What's left now is your decision on who will build those new reactors at Darlington. Considering that Ontario is bleeding jobs daily and you have repeatedly said that we are in extraordinary times, what is your plan to ensure that the almost 40,000 jobs, mostly in Ontario, associated with nuclear research, development and build are not lost if our own homegrown bidder, Atomic Energy of Canada, is not awarded the contract?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member's question is designed to make a mockery of a fair and competitive process over the most expensive item that you can procure in a province. So I just want to say to the honourable member that while he's a booster for one of the three bidders in particular, our process has been run with a very, very strenuous focus on extracting for the people of the province of Ontario the very best arrangement.

We have three quality bidders who are bringing their proposals to us in seeking to supply us with two new nuclear reactors. As we move forward to entering into a contract with one of those individual companies, it will be focused on the very best arrangements for the people of Ontario, which of course includes price, productivity and economic impact here in the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Premier likes to talk about the new economy and how it will create the jobs Ontario needs. Well, I have news for you, Premier: Nuclear new build, here and around the world—here and around the world—and the research and development it requires, is an integral part of the new economy.

If you agree that not building our own Canadian-designed and -built reactors here will make building elsewhere unlikely, I ask you again, what is your plan to ensure that these jobs don't go the way of hundreds of thousands of others under your leadership?

Hon. George Smitherman: As a component of the measurement of which of these proponents we will seek to be in contract with, we have established, in the very mechanisms and nature of the bid, opportunities for a company to earn points associated with the economic impact that they will have here in the province of Ontario.

We acknowledge, of course, that there has been a domestic industry for some time, and the province of Ontario has been their very best customer for a long time. But there are competitive technologies, and we think it's important, since it is such a substantial procurement—because it is for a 50- or 60-year lifeline—that we make a decision on the basis of what is the best price and what is the best productivity associated with the technology on offer. But economic development and the impact it has here in the province of Ontario is one essential component of all bids that are being evaluated at the present time.

PROPERTY TAXATION IMPÔTS FONCIERS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You're seeing team NDP in action here today, and I'm proud to say that we're one team, one family, all together.

I've got to say, I've got a question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs over there. It would seem that a number of people, not only in the city of Timmins but across the province, are pretty upset with what's happening with their tax bills this year. In our community, the city of Timmins, they've had to increase the taxes by 3.5%. But because of the flawed municipal assessment system, we're seeing people with far more than that. In fact I've got a constituent who has been on my doorstep, and at the doorstep of the municipality, knocking daily, because his taxes are going up by 13.5% this year alone.

My question to you is, do you think that's fair, and what are you going to do about fixing it?

1110

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me thank the honourable member for the question. It gives me an opportunity, once again, to talk about some of the positive investments the McGuinty government has made in communities like Timmins. Let me quote the mayor of Timmins, who said, "This Liberal government has been very good to municipalities. They realize the shortfalls we have in infrastructure."

As a result of investments that we've made in Timmins—for instance, \$380,000 in the fall economic statement for transit and transportation in Timmins; they received more than \$600,000 in gas tax revenue from the McGuinty government. We have also invested \$850,000 in 2005-06 and 2006-07 as a result of infrastructure investments.

This government takes seriously the partnership that we have made and signed on the dotted line with the municipal sector, and we look forward to working with them in the future to ensure that the taxes are kept low—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

M. Gilles Bisson: Mais, monsieur le ministre, écoutez. La population n'est pas contente. La question devient que cet individu-là a besoin de payer plus d'impôts cette année à cause du système que vous avez en place. Il veut savoir ce que vous autres, le gouvernement, allez faire pour réparer la situation.

Ce n'est pas juste que ces personnes-là, comme mille autres personnes à travers Timmins et autres cités à travers cette province, ont des augmentations de 13 %, 15 % et 20 %. Je vous demande encore : êtes-vous préparé à faire quelque chose pour que ce monde-là puisse avoir de la justesse et ne paie pas plus de 3,5 %, comme toutes les autres personnes ont eu ?

L'hon. Jim Watson: C'est la même question en français qu'en anglais, et je vais donner la même réponse.

Let me just remind the honourable member about a couple of things. We brought in a seniors' property tax grant to help those individuals who are on fixed income,

representing low-income seniors. The NDP voted against that particular aspect, and I don't know why. I don't know why the NDP continues to vote against positive, progressive measures that this government has brought forward.

We're particularly proud of the fact that we have brought forward a series of infrastructure programs to reduce the burden on property taxpayers in communities like Timmins. Under the MIII program, the people of Timmins received \$7.2 million last year alone. That frees up additional revenue so that the municipality can put it into their priority projects and keep taxes at a lower rate.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

March 11 to 17 is Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. An average of 22 people die each year in farm-related incidents. All members of this House agree that just one death is too many and that our government should work with our partners to ensure the safety of our farmers and our farm workers.

The theme of this year's Canadian Agricultural Safety Week, as determined by the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, is personal protective equipment. This week reminds us how important it is that we seek continued improvement in our farm safety record year after year. All members of this House know there is much work to be done to ensure the safety of farmers and farm workers across this province.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, what kinds of initiatives are being undertaken by her ministry and our partners in the agricultural sector that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: It is an important question, because farm safety is a very important issue, certainly in rural Ontario and for my constituents.

Our government is very pleased to work with the Farm Safety Association. Their mandate is to reduce the occurrence of workplace injuries on Ontario farms. My ministry has been working with the Farm Safety Association for over 10 years now to fund safety projects targeting farm families, youth and older workers alike. My ministry is pleased to provide this association with \$120,000 annually to support a number of projects.

The farm accident rescue program is one of those, where they specifically train volunteer firefighters in rural communities in terms of how to deal safely with incidents that occur on farms—a very, very important program. Also, the farm accident rescue program—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: All around Ontario, farmers are very hard at work, working to put food on their tables and on our tables. But we all know that working on the farm can be dangerous. Many of my constituents in my

riding certainly are farmers, and they know first-hand about the hazards that face them each and every day.

Minister, can you tell them what your ministry is doing to improve their health and safety at their workplace?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for the question and the opportunity to share what my ministry is doing in this area.

The health and safety of Ontario workers, including our agricultural workers, is our number one priority, so we've extended the Occupational Health and Safety Act to cover farming operations. Since 2006, farm workers have had the same rights as other workers, including the right to know about workplace hazards, the right to participate in workplace health and safety decisions, and the right to refuse unsafe work. This is helping to reduce farming injuries and fatalities, lessening human suffering and reducing economic costs. This is strengthening our economy.

We will continue to work with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the WSIB, the Labour Issues Coordinating Committee and the Farm Safety Association to help improve—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is for the Premier. On November 27 of last year, following the announcement that 850 employees would lose their jobs as a result of a Magna plant shutdown, I called on the Premier to specifically undertake to ensure that his government would make resources available to the local communities for the retraining of these employees. Could the Premier tell us what specific plans since that appeal to him in November have been made to ensure that those programs are in place for these employees who will lose their jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: I think all members of the House are always concerned with news of a layoff. Within one hour of hearing news of a layoff, I can assure the member that officials with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities are in touch with the workers, perhaps through their union or other organization, with the company involved and other players, to offer support that's needed and to make sure that workers are aware of what services are available through Employment Ontario, such as training and retraining. In many cases, we work to set up an action centre which allows workers to come together and receive peer support and a network and a pathway into Employment Ontario services.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: I continue to receive calls and have meetings with employees who are very concerned that they are not going to have the kind of support that was promised. On November 27, I made specific reference to

the fact that many of these employees have English as a second language and asked that programs specifically for the training of people for language be put in place. To date, I have heard of nothing specific that addresses that issue.

I would ask the Premier once again, would he report to this House what specific programs have been put in place to address those retraining programs, and specifically, what programs and resources have been put in place for York region to provide English-as-a-second-language training for these employees?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very happy to look into the specific case that he is talking about and provide specifics, but in general, I think the member should be aware that through Employment Ontario, we treat about 900,000 individuals who come forward every year. There is a wide variety of programs available for those individuals, everything from job search to resumé-writing through to short-term and long-term retraining.

One of the angles that we pursue when it comes to retraining is offering individuals the opportunity for literacy and numeracy upgrading, an ability to get their basic skills up to speed so they can enter training and retraining programs. We've seen a success through the rapid re-employment and training service—as I say, the team that goes through that I referenced in my first answer. We've helped over 57,000 people in the last year. Over the last eight months, over 16,000 people have come forward for specific training opportunities—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1120

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Queen Street East in the Beach was named by TVO as the best Main Street to shop in all of Ontario. Sadly, many merchants in my riding are hurting. They are finding it tough to weather this recession. As reported in today's Toronto Star, some have unfortunately had to shut the doors and put the padlock on.

Why has this government turned its back on small business people and local economies by not providing leadership and help during these tough times?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: First of all, let me congratulate the member and the new leader of the third party on a successful weekend. In the immortal words of Don Corleone to a new rival gang leader, "As long as your interests and mine don't conflict, I wish you well."

To respond to the member's very serious question, we have taken a number of steps to address—and let's not pretend that any single policy initiative is going to relieve the crisis that's going on in the world economy. We've reduced the business education tax, first of all. Last year, we raised the threshold for the small business tax rate on corporate tax to the highest in Canada. Those were two important initiatives that were applauded by the small business community. We will continue to work with them through this—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: These are very nice words that I've heard today, but the Queen Street merchants live, play and work in our community. They drive our local economy. Property taxes are driving them into bankruptcy. Small merchants pay more, regardless of their actual incomes and ability to pay.

Why won't this government implement a progressive property taxation system that is fair for small business owners by linking it to their revenues instead of forcing more of them to close up shop and board up the best Main Street in all of Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Our government has also undertaken a number of initiatives to upload costs from municipalities to help with the pressures associated with property taxes. Those include a range of things from public transit up through court security and social services.

I would remind the member, just as he voted against the business education tax reduction and just as he voted against raising the ceiling on small business income for tax purposes, he voted against those initiatives.

The proposal he puts forward will not help small business on Queen Street. He may think it does, and I'm sure he conveys that with great sincerity. The measures we've taken are the best measures in these times. I wish he would have supported them at the time.

ABORIGINAL LAND CLAIMS

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. Minister, you and I had the pleasure of visiting the community of Kettle and Stony Point last month in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex. While you were there, you were able to see how far that community has come since the tragic events of 1995.

During our visit, we discussed the fact that the Ipperwash resolution table is developing an interim plan with the local community to determine how the land and Ipperwash park will be used and managed until the transfer of the park is complete. The return of Ipperwash park to the First Nations, of course, is just one of the recommendations coming out of the Ipperwash inquiry that your ministry is working on.

Your ministry is also acting on Justice Linden's recommendations for land claims reform. Minister, can you tell us about some of the steps that your ministry is taking to improve that process?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to begin by thanking the member for joining me on my recent visit to Kettle and Stony Point First Nation. But more than that, I want to thank the member for her leadership in her local community. This member really gets it when it comes to the need to build bridges between First Nations communities and surrounding communities, and she's working very hard in her riding to make sure that is done. That is in the interests of the First Nations communities and it's in the interests of all communities in this province, so I thank her for her local leadership in that respect.

The member is quite right. We're working very hard to implement the Ipperwash inquiry report, including, of course, the creation of the first stand-alone Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs in the history of the province of Ontario. We're also bringing in changes to speed up the land claims process. We're doing this not only because we know it's our obligation to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Clearly, your ministry is working hard to implement these reforms, but First Nations' capacity to effectively participate in claim negotiations is essential in achieving settlements. That includes having the tools to assist these communities with the claim submission process. Minister, I've heard you talk about how you think settling more land claims will have a positive impact on the social and economic well-being of all residents in Ontario. Can you explain what you meant by this, and how settling a First Nations claim might have a positive impact on other Ontarians?

Hon. Brad Duguid: That's a very good question because there's absolutely no doubt at all that settling these land claims will have a positive effect not only in First Nation communities but right across this province.

Negotiated settlements result in a much more enduring solution for all parties. They strengthen the relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities by clarifying rights and obligations of First Nations through negotiations. Uncertainty is also reduced. What this does is it attracts more private investment, which is something we all need to attract to First Nation communities and certainly to all communities across this province.

This is our opportunity to build stronger First Nation communities. It's our opportunity to close some of those gaps that exist between First Nations' quality of life and the quality of life enjoyed by other Ontarians. I thank the member for her question. Again, I thank her for her leadership in her own—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Minister of Health. Minister, last May I asked the previous Minister of Health about the movement of in-patient mental health beds from Rouge Valley Ajax hospital to Scarborough Centenary and quoted the psychiatrists at that hospital, who said, "It is our strong opinion that the elimination of the acute care beds will compromise the quality and safety of care for those seriously ill patients."

I was told by the previous Minister of Health not to worry; everything would result in enhanced patient care and that a psychiatric intensive care unit would be constructed at Scarborough Centenary. I recently visited that site and there is no intensive care psychiatric unit on that floor. There are 40 patients on the floor, many of whom are a danger to themselves and others.

Minister, why won't you release the rest of the growth-based funding to the Central East LHIN so they can construct this much-needed unit?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member very much for the question because in fact our government is the first which recognized the growth pressures in the province of Ontario, where previously, I would say to the member opposite, her colleagues, when they were on this side of the House, did not recognize those kind of factors when it came to health care spending.

In the last budget, my colleague the Minister of Finance outlined \$120 million over the course of three years to be able to provide—I can assure the member that, in the first year, \$30 million did flow to local health integration networks to be allocated to hospitals to recognize the growth pressures, as the member just recognized.

While I can't speak to the March 26 budget, I can tell you that our government continues to recognize growth and the growth needs that exist out there. We will continue to recognize the unique characteristics of a very high-growth community like Durham, as the member does represent, in meeting their needs as we do right around the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: This is an urgent situation. As a result of your government's failure to construct this psychiatric intensive care unit, not only are patients at risk; now so are staff. In late January, two nurses were viciously attacked by a patient on the psychiatric floor and both sustained serious head injuries, including a fractured jaw and facial lacerations.

Minister, the nurse-to-patient ratio at this hospital is one to eight. I'm told that the ratio at Rouge Valley Ajax is one to five. This is not safe for anyone, Minister. What are you going to do to fix this situation to ensure the safety of both patients and staff?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, there has been considerable work which has taken place. I do acknowledge, as the member has pointed out, that nursing and provision of care in our health care system is, at times, a dangerous job. They are working under difficult circumstances. That's why we are driving out healthy work environments. That's why we have nurse team leaders. That's why, for example, for needle-stick injuries, bed lifts or a host of areas we are working in the Ministry of Health with my colleague the Minister of Labour to ensure a safe workplace for the people within the health care system.

1130

I want to assure the member that we are connecting and have connected with nursing leadership to ensure that we have the resources in place, the expertise in place and the supports in place that will be able to support. I don't want to recognize that these will never be issues—we know that they will be on an ongoing basis—but I want to assure the member that we will be there to continue to support our nurses as they move forward to provide outstanding care.

LIQUOR CONTROL BOARD OF ONTARIO

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. The LCBO, an agency of this government,

actively promotes the use of alcohol. Meanwhile, a new landmark study found that even one or two drinks of alcohol a day significantly increases the risk of breast cancer to the tune of 12% and rectal and liver cancer to the tune of 24% among women. The Ministry of Health foots the bill for alcohol consumption in Ontario to the tune of \$1 billion a year. How can the Premier justify spending millions of dollars on advertising to promote alcohol use when we know that it will turn out costing the health care system billions of dollars?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the finance minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Indeed we do own the Liquor Control Board of Ontario, and I want to remind the member that we still have something called "social reference pricing," which builds in—in fact, the minimum price of beer is the most recent example of that policy in force. The LCBO profits are, in turn, directed into the consolidated revenue funds of the government, which help to fund initiatives like the health care treatment that's associated with any range of challenging medical conditions.

The study the member references indeed reminds us of the importance of understanding the consequence of the use of alcohol, and I believe that the system we've developed for the distribution of alcohol is the best system available to governments of all political stripes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, the reality is that the McGuinty government is actually seeking to increase alcohol use in Ontario. Between 2005 and 2006, the last figures available, the LCBO doubled its spending on advertising. I'm sure that everybody has seen the glossy promotional material that is put out by the LCBO to encourage people in Ontario to consume more alcohol, and it is under the McGuinty government's watch that the LCBO wants to further increase their sales by 30%. This is their objective: 30% more sales.

When will the Premier stop standing idly by while the government promotes health-damaging alcohol use? As the Minister of Finance says, it's a money loser: The money you bring in does not cover the health care costs.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The LCBO does promote the wine industry in Niagara, for instance, and I'm surprised the member from Welland wouldn't have asked his colleague to acknowledge that.

I ran the largest alcohol and drug recovery program in this country for almost eight years. What I can tell you is that the responsible pricing that is built into the publicly owned LCBO remains, in our view, the proper way of the distribution of alcohol here in Ontario. I would remind the member opposite that even if the LCBO were to do no advertising at all, the advertising of the big beer companies, the big liquor companies and the big wine companies from outside the province would overwhelm us in any event. So we do want to continue—the member from Welland—to promote the Niagara wine and grape industry.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. Minister, in the town of Stirling, a company, Stonehedge, is driving clean technology forward and capturing global investment. Stonehedge is quickly becoming a pre-eminent hemp bio-refinery in North America, and they're doing it through respect for both the environment and the individual by promoting a safe workplace where employees can develop their capability and go through education and skills development; excellence in personal and corporate performance to meet or exceed their customer needs at every opportunity; teamwork in all endeavours that foster an atmosphere for continued improvement; innovation and technical superiority, and as a chosen core, competitiveness.

The question to you, Minister: What is the Ministry of Research and Innovation doing to help foster the growth of innovative companies such as Stonehedge?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my good friend for the question. I was pleased to join the MPP for Northumberland—Quinte West as Stonehedge announced it will receive a \$2-million investment by a group of international investors from the United Kingdom. Starting in spring 2009, Stonehedge expects to build a new biorefining facility in eastern Ontario that will employ up to 27 people by 2011. The company expects to produce more than \$17 million per year in renewable hemp fibre, wood-like chips and pellets, as well as matting and seed products. Ontario, through the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and the Eastern Lake Ontario Regional Innovation Network, which is funded by my ministry, has been providing Stonehedge with advice, expertise and support in building international partnerships.

Ontario is well positioned to develop innovative solutions in this area. The province has a wealth of renewable carbon, and companies such as Stonehedge are proving that the world is looking for the innovative processes and services that we are developing.

MINE TO MACE PROJECT

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Just to remind the members, the diamond cutting for the new mace has begun. The diamond cutter was ill, but he has begun work today, and it's a very interesting process. Just outside the Speaker's office in one of the heritage rooms the work has begun.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1136 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Reza Moridi: I'm delighted to welcome the deputy mayor of the town of Richmond Hill, Brenda

Hogg, and the chair of the Richmond Hill Women's International Day, Angel Freedman, to the House.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM
FUNDING

Mr. Ted Arnott: The residents of the town of Erin and the township of Centre Wellington are fuming because these communities' Building Canada fund applications were turned down in the most recent round. We are demanding that the Minister of Infrastructure provide a complete explanation for his government's failure to deliver results in these communities.

In the case of the town of Erin, the council was applying for funding to replace a bridge that has been deemed structurally inadequate and unsafe. The town council and staff made a strong case with a detailed and compelling proposal establishing the need for provincial funding. The tax base of this small rural municipality is inadequate to pay for all of their infrastructure needs, so they need help from the provincial government.

In the case of Centre Wellington township, a strong application was made to help finance the Elora waste water treatment plant upgrades. Again, they were turned down without a meaningful explanation as to why.

In my almost 19 years in this Legislature, I have consistently stood for generous financial assistance from the provincial government to small and rural communities. Their infrastructure projects must be a high priority—especially now, in this time of extreme economic challenge. I call upon the Minister of Infrastructure to review the Building Canada fund criteria, give priority consideration in future rounds to communities shut out in the last round and announce that he will begin to share the provincial gas tax with all municipalities, large and small, as he should, as the federal government does.

WORLD KIDNEY DAY

Mr. Charles Sousa: I rise in recognition that Thursday is World Kidney Day. As many of my colleagues in this Legislature know, March is Kidney Health Month and March 12 marks the fourth annual World Kidney Day.

World Kidney Day was conceived to raise awareness about the importance of kidney health, including proper screening, prevention and management, particularly in the context of chronic kidney disease, which is common, harmful and treatable.

The Kidney Foundation of Canada and other key organizations and partners in kidney care, including Baxter Canada in Mississauga, have issued a call to action to all Ontarians to measure, monitor and manage their blood pressure. As well, Ontarians are encouraged to speak with their health care providers about managing

their kidney health, including the opportunity to be screened for chronic kidney disease.

This is important now more than ever because of the link between diabetes and kidney health. Diabetes is on the rise. It can compromise kidney function, resulting in chronic kidney disease and subsequently requiring dialysis care either in hospital or at home. Approximately 10,000 Ontarians receive dialysis care. Another 500,000 Ontarians are at risk of developing chronic kidney disease.

That's why our government has taken significant action to help people manage diabetes with the launch of the provincial diabetes strategy in July. It included a commitment to focus on improving access to care and management of chronic kidney disease and specifically access to home dialysis.

I would like to thank the Kidney Foundation of Canada and their partners for their commitment to improving the lives of Ontarians and continuing to advocate for improving access to kidney care, from prevention and screening to appropriate management of chronic kidney disease.

TOWN OF CALEDON

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise today to congratulate the town of Caledon in my riding of Dufferin-Caledon on being named the safest place to live in Canada for the second year in a row by Maclean's magazine in their annual report.

The "safest place to live" designation is based on per capita crime data from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

I'm very proud to represent a town such as Caledon, which takes pride in its people and its community.

I would like to acknowledge the Caledon detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police and the volunteers on the Caledon policing advisory council for their efforts to keep our community safe. Congratulations on another great year to Caledon OPP detachment Commander Andy Karski and Mayor Marolyn Morrison. I thank you both for your hard work to make Caledon a safer place.

Hundreds of volunteer hours are put in every year by outstanding organizations like Citizens on Patrol, Youth Leadership and Road Watch. A price cannot be placed on your dedication to community safety.

Finally, I congratulate the residents of Caledon. It is your hard work and pride in your community that bring you the recognition you so deserve in making Caledon a safer community in which to live, work and raise a family.

WARKWORTH MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I rise in the House today to invite all my colleagues here at Queen's Park to take a trip to my riding of Northumberland-Quinte West. The community of Warkworth will be hosting its 23rd annual Maple Syrup Festival this weekend, March 14 and 15.

There will be horse-drawn sleigh rides, syrup-making demonstrations, snowshoe races and taffy sampling. If square dancing and step dancing aren't your thing, then I bet that clogging will surely entertain you. As well, you will be entertained all weekend with old-time fiddling and country music.

The festival includes a variety of activities for the whole family, starting each day with a wonderful pancake and sausage breakfast. Free parking and shuttle buses are provided to transport you each day.

Did you know that maple trees are almost 40 years old before they can be tapped for syrup? Did you know that Ontario is the fourth-largest maple syrup producer in the world? Did you know that maple syrup is a good source of calcium, iron and thiamine?

This is only a sample of what you can learn if you join me at the Warkworth Maple Syrup Festival this weekend. I look forward to seeing you and I'll be there to welcome all the guests on Saturday morning.

Interjection: We'll be there.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. John O'Toole: Many doctors and indeed their patients feel that our local hospitals are being threatened. Citizens in the riding of Durham are concerned over the future of their ER and other acute care services in Bowmanville, as well as the obstetrics services at Lakeridge Health Port Perry.

Recently I met with Dr. Tony Stone, Dr. Ben Fuller, Dr. Will Lottering and Dr. Ed Osborne to gain a better understanding of the needs and priorities in our Bowmanville hospital. Citizens are standing up for the Bowmanville hospital with thousands of petitions asking for the continuation of ER, general surgery and internal medicine. I've also met with Kevin Empey, the CEO of Lakeridge Health; and James Meloche of the Central East Local Health Integration Network.

This is a province-wide issue. It is a concern raised by the wardens of western Ontario, eastern Ontario and northern Ontario. The wardens want to ensure that all small community hospitals will continue to serve small and rural communities. The McGuinty government must do its part through fair funding of the GTA and 905 communities, especially growth communities, and the policies that recognize the important role of small hospitals.

I urge the members of the government and the opposition to support the Healthy Communities Initiative, which really amounts to making sure that each community gets the population-based funding that it is entitled to. We wouldn't have a problem if they would fund people fairly across the province of Ontario.

OCCUPATIONAL CANCER RESEARCH CENTRE

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I rise in this House today to speak about the inception of the Occupational Cancer

Research Centre, a collaborative partnership that has brought together labour, the business community, medical researchers and charitable organizations to collectively seek ways of studying and preventing occupational exposures that lead to cancer. The collective expertise of the centre is a testament to the hard work and coordination undertaken by the Canadian Cancer Society, Cancer Care Ontario, the WSIB and the United Steelworkers.

Together with the Minister of Labour, I had the pleasure of attending the opening of the centre last Thursday, where it was made clear by all presenters that combining their individual experiences in dealing with cancer-related issues is the best way to make progress.

I understand the need to maintain workplace safety. Through my constituency office in my riding in York South–Weston, I hear first-hand the experiences of our area's WSIB injured workers. For far too long, carcinogenic exposures have endangered and claimed the lives of countless men and women earning a living in Ontario. Setting up this research centre will combine the talents of professionals from all walks of life to tackle this complex disease and find creative ways of making Ontario's workplace sites the safest in the world.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who were involved in setting up the OCRC, and to wish them well as they begin this historic partnership.

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JACOB McGAVIN

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to congratulate an outstanding young man from the riding of Huron–Bruce, Jacob McGavin. Jacob is one of the recipients of the 2008 Ontario Junior Citizen of the Year Award. The award, which is run through the Ontario Community Newspapers Association, recognizes outstanding youth who are making a difference in their communities. Jacob has made a remarkable effort to help children in his local community—the community being the world at large.

On his 12th birthday, Jacob founded Kids Care, a group of young teens striving to make a difference in poorer areas of the world and to improve child education. Under Jacob's guidance, the group has collected food for local food banks and has raised a significant amount of money to build a school in Africa.

Young people such as Jacob are a testament to positive changes that one civic-minded individual can bring about. Jacob has demonstrated great leadership, and I feel we are certainly in good hands with this province going forward into the future.

I ask this House to join me in congratulating the recipients of the 2008 Ontario Junior Citizen of the Year Award on their recent achievements. I also want to add that Jacob comes from a long line of community-minded people. Congratulations to his parents and his grandparents.

JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE

M^{me} France Gélina: J'aimerais souligner que le vendredi 20 mars prochain, 870 millions de personnes vont célébrer la Journée internationale de la francophonie. Nous fêtons cette journée en exprimant notre solidarité et notre désir de vivre ensemble, dans nos différences et notre diversité, partageant ainsi les valeurs de la francophonie.

Comme membre du comité directeur des femmes de l'Association des parlementaires francophones, j'ai eu l'occasion de me rendre au Cambodge au début du mois dernier et de constater la perte de vitesse du français. Les efforts de reconstruction du Cambodge sont soutenus par plusieurs pays, incluant le Canada, et sont faits en anglais, sans prendre en considération le riche héritage francophone de ce pays.

Les Cambodgiens et Cambodgiennes adorent leur baguette de pain. Ils vivent dans des villes qui sont définitivement françaises, avec des arrondissements, et on y retrouve la rue Charles de Gaulle. Par contre, à l'école, les enfants n'apprennent plus le français.

Mais j'aimerais mentionner que notre Assemblée législative ici en Ontario n'a pas de quoi faire la leçon aux autres. Le français y est toléré, mais certainement pas encouragé, ni utilisé couramment. De plus, certains items de communication, tel notre site Web—c'est une honte à la francophonie, tellement il est cousu de fautes et de mauvaises tournures de phrases. Même les noms des députés n'ont pas les accents de la langue française.

Bonne Journée internationale de la francophonie à tout le monde; c'est le temps de célébrer. J'aimerais mentionner M. Jean-Charles Cachon de Sudbury, qui recevra l'insigne de chevalier dans l'ordre du mérite mercredi soir.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mr. Reza Moridi: Sunday, March 8, was International Women's Day, a day that the town of Richmond Hill has proclaimed to commemorate the contributions of women to the community.

This past Saturday, I had the pleasure of attending the town of Richmond Hill's celebration of International Women's Day with my colleague Dr. Helena Jaczek, along with Deputy Mayor Brenda Hogg and International Women's Day chair Angel Freedman.

This annual celebration inspires women throughout the world, and recognizes and reflects upon the progress made to advance women's equality and women's achievements in today's society.

The day is an official holiday in many countries, and is observed by men giving the women in their lives—that is, mothers, wives, girlfriends, daughters, granddaughters and colleagues—flowers and small gifts.

The women's rights issue that has been brought forward this year is the ignorance of specific health care needs of women that have been insufficiently taken into

account in war situations, where women are particularly at risk of rape and other forms of violence.

I would like to take this opportunity to ask all Ontarians to celebrate this day by pledging to stop the unlawful persecution of women by helping to increase the social awareness of the struggles of women world-wide.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mr. Pat Hoy: I beg leave to present a report on pre-budget consultation 2009 from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Pat Hoy: Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT RENDEMENT SCOLAIRE

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think we all know that the future prosperity of Ontario relies on today's youth. They will be the innovators and leaders who will drive Ontario's economy, they are the citizens of tomorrow, and they will make this province a better place to live. So it is essential that they graduate high school and have successful careers and lives. To allow them to do so, we are providing them with a high-quality education that matches their skills, interests and ambitions. In Ontario, we're fortunate to have exceptional and committed teachers, school administrators and support staff who are focused on reaching every student. In addition, the support that we received from parents, employers and community members to improve student achievement has been overwhelming.

Avec nos partenaires, nous avons été en mesure de concevoir et de mettre en place de nouveaux programmes qui suscitent la motivation des élèves du secondaire. Ce travail collectif d'amélioration du système d'éducation publique de l'Ontario rapporte gros à nos élèves.

I'm proud to report that Ontario's high school graduation rate has increased for the fourth year in a row. It now stands at 77%, a significant increase from just 68% five years ago. What that means is that 36,000 additional students have graduated in Ontario since

2003-04. Another way of thinking about it is that 13,500 more Ontario students graduated in 2007-08 compared to 2003-04. These are very big numbers and they represent large efforts by everyone to reach out to struggling students and give them the support that they need.

Our government believes that a one-size-fits-all approach to education does not work. That's why we've introduced programs that allow students to customize their high school experience and make it more relevant. That includes specialist high-skills majors that are bundles of eight to 10 courses in a student's selected field such as information technology or hospitality. Our dual credit program allows students to participate in apprenticeship training and post-secondary courses while still in high school. It's these types of new options that let students focus on a career path that matches their skills and interests. Working with our education partners, we've created a more engaging learning environment for students that better prepares them to pursue future opportunities beyond high school.

I have heard countless stories from students and teachers across the province on how these changes are making a true difference. For example, Jonathan Camiré from Ottawa had his sights set on a career in an orchestra after falling in love with the French horn. However, he found it hard to motivate himself in the classroom, in part because of a learning disability. The specialist high-skills major in arts and culture offered by école secondaire catholique Béatrice-Desloges solved that problem. He took a bundle of eight courses in grades 11 and 12 that included a course about careers in the arts, in addition to at least one hands-on music course per semester. Then he found himself suddenly concentrating and participating more in school. So those courses allowed him to focus on what was going on in the rest of his courses. Last June, Jonathan successfully graduated from high school, and he plans to continue pursuing a career in music. His story is just one among thousands, and that's why we're committed to students' success.

Les élèves comme Jonathan méritent toutes les occasions d'atteindre leur plein potentiel. Notre gouvernement continuera d'aider davantage d'élèves à obtenir leur diplôme d'études secondaires.

We remain committed to raising the graduation rate even higher: to 85%. I'm certain we'll succeed because we have the support of wonderful educators, parents and community members. Together we'll ensure that Ontario has a bright, strong and vibrant economic future.

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RECHERCHE ET INNOVATION RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

L'hon. John Wilkinson: Je prends la parole aujourd'hui pour demander à tous les côtés de la Chambre de se joindre à moi pour célébrer la nouvelle d'une percée de la recherche menée en Ontario, la nouvelle que les expertes et experts appellent une « élégante découverte ».

Humanity hungers for cures for the diseases and injuries that plague us still. Today, with increasing confidence, we can imagine a world where we will unlock the power of our own bodies to cure diseases like diabetes, cancer, cystic fibrosis, kidney and heart disease and to reverse the devastation of injuries to the brain and spinal cord by repairing or even, one day, growing replacement organs and tissues derived from our very own cells.

We are on the cusp of a turning point in history. An organ damaged by disease or injury would no longer mean a death sentence or a lifelong disability. A person's own immune system wouldn't reject the new organ or tissue because they would not be foreign to our body because, instead, they would arise from our own body.

This is the promise of regenerative medicine. In my opinion, it will increasingly become part of our health care future because of stem cells, special cells found within our bodies that can and do turn themselves into any part of our bodies. Already, stem cells are being used in bone marrow transplants to treat leukemia, but the field is still in its infancy.

Due to the wise investments of successive governments, Ontario is known as a world leader in stem cell research. In fact, it was Ontario scientists Doctors Ernest McCulloch and James Till of the University of Toronto who discovered stem cells back in 1961. Ontario has built upon this discovery, developing a strong foundation in stem cell research, from Dr. Tony Pawson unlocking cell biology to Dr. John Dick discovering cancer stem cells to Dr. Janet Rossant developing induced pluripotent stem cells, and so many, many more in our province.

Now we have a major new breakthrough we can all be proud of. Dr. Andras Nagy, at the Samuel Lunenfeld Research Institute at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto, has led a team of researchers who have found a new, safer way to create stem cells from the most ready and accessible of sources: our own skin cells. They've just published their findings in the internationally respected science journal *Nature*.

Let me give you an idea of how important their discovery is. Not only did our papers here cover this as a front-page story, but it was in the news in Washington and California and as far afield as Ireland, England and Japan. The discovery made by Dr. Nagy and his team represents an enormous contribution to the future of health science.

What's more, Dr. Nagy and his team are among the 10,000 scientists, clinical investigators and other researchers who make Ontario the largest hub of biomedical activity in Canada and the fourth-largest biomedical research centre in North America.

As part of this cluster, Ontario is supporting other exciting stem cell research initiatives. For example, we've committed some \$357 million over five years to the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research, which has made stem cell research a focal point of their work. Through the institute, we have invested \$30 million to support the International Cancer Genome Consortium,

through which scientists around the world are working together to unlock the genome of the 50 most common cancer tumours that plague humanity. It is knowledge that could lead to innovative new treatments or even cures. Ontario will serve as the world headquarters of this global effort.

Ontario has also been tasked to serve as the global data centre. In essence, we are creating the largest health informatics database in history.

Ontario can't fund research all alone. We need all levels of government to support our leading-edge researchers so that they can rise to the challenge of overcoming diseases like cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

La recherche et l'innovation font un élément vital du plan économique en cinq points de l'Ontario. Le premier ministre, M. McGuinty, a créé la ministère de la Recherche et de l'Innovation pour orienter l'engagement de notre gouvernement de sorte à faire de l'innovation l'élément moteur de l'économie de l'Ontario. Au titre du programme d'innovation de l'Ontario de 3 \$ milliards, nous créons un solide milieu pour l'innovation en Ontario. Nous appuyons des chercheurs et chercheuses de calibre mondial, ainsi que des industries et des compagnies qui jettent un pont entre l'innovation de l'Ontario et le marché mondial.

That means top researchers will stay in Ontario and breakthroughs like Dr. Nagy's will keep happening here and, as we have seen, history will continue to be made right here in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I'm happy to respond today in the House, first of all, to congratulate all the successful graduating classes of 2009 as they prepare for new and exciting careers in their lives; secondly, to reinforce the importance of identifying future opportunities for our students that fit with their skills and interest levels. Now, more than ever, we as elected representatives need to ensure that our students are completing their high school education.

We live in a global marketplace, and Ontario students should be positioned to be successful in that competitive arena. To date, our education system continues to be biased towards post-secondary education. We're edging further away from it, but we're still there. I believe in the value of post-secondary education, but we also need to realize that this is not the option for everyone. If a student feels that he or she is only staying in high school to continue on to post-secondary, and those are not their plans, we lose that student.

I would like to see a stronger focus on our skilled trades and apprenticeship programs and offer students more of an opportunity for alternate career paths. If we engage these students in high school and reinforce the importance of completing their high school education while offering them a career path that fits with their interests, then we can strengthen our graduation rates.

We are still losing those students because they don't see the value of finishing their education.

Likewise, our students in high-risk areas need increased mentoring and support to assist them in fighting off the elements that would like to see them fail. We want to see them succeed. Perhaps if the Minister of Education supported projects like CARES that capture these students when they struggle inside our education system, then we could save more students who are caught in a cycle of poverty and crime. As a government, we need to be thinking outside of the box. The current mindset and approach is not reaching the students who fall outside of the ministry's model for education.

I am pleased to see that we are making strides with our graduation rates for those students who are already working within the system. However, I don't see the statistics for the graduation rates of our high-risk students who have already fallen between the cracks and who have the most to lose. It is these students who warrant the attention of this government if we are truly to make a difference.

In the future, I hope to see a broader perspective taken by our guidance counsellors and support staff in our high schools to realize that there are a variety of options that lead to a successful, productive life. Much more emphasis needs to be put on relieving students from feeling stigmatized if they don't pursue a university education.

Another statistic that is not revealed, and should be, is: How well prepared are our graduates as they transition from high school? Are they prepared to succeed in their careers, or are they part of a politically motivated agenda?

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the Minister of Research and Innovation on his statement to do with recognizing Ontario breakthroughs in stem cell research. Certainly, I would like to add my congratulations to Dr. Andras Nagy and his team at the Samuel Lunenfeld Research Institute at Mount Sinai Hospital. It truly is exciting news, their recent breakthrough discovery, where they found a new way of creating stem cells using human skin to reprogram them into pluripotent stem cells, which are cells that can develop into most other cell types. As well, whereas previously you had to use viruses to deliver the required genes, they now have a new method that doesn't require the use of viruses.

So this is truly exciting because of the difference this can make in the future for those people who suffer from spinal cord injury or macular degeneration or diabetes or Parkinson's disease. It gives hope for possible cures for those diseases and can really make a difference in the lives of the people who are affected.

I think, personally, of Aaron Lillie in Bracebridge, who was injured in a diving accident just last year and has a spinal cord injury. This sort of research and

development gives a person like Aaron hope that in the future it may be applied to him. So I'm very pleased; it's exciting news. As well, of course, there are economic spinoffs from developments like this. I'm pleased to see Ontario leading the way in stem cell research, and I congratulate Dr. Nagy and his team.

1330

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is a response to the Minister of Education's statement. It would be very comforting for us to just accept the numbers. But even if we were tempted to do that, the numbers still show that almost a quarter of students are not graduating. That's nothing to celebrate. You wanted a number, and now you have a number. But what does the number really mean? That's the important question.

Unfortunately, just like EQAO results, the government is more concerned with generating a politically useful number than ensuring that real achievement and future success of students is taking place. In order to pad the numbers, secondary school teachers have been put under extraordinary pressure to pass students, according to the OSSTF. This is not my information, this is the OSSTF, and I would think they would know.

Their Education Forum magazine says that teachers are feeling pressure to adjust failing marks. From the same article, teachers are concerned about a system that "allows late assignments to go unpenalized, plagiarized essays to be rewritten, absolute deadlines to be repeatedly extended, unsubmitted work to be accepted after the semester is over, and obvious failures to be overturned."

Is this something to celebrate in our education system, I ask, rather than creating the alternative programming and providing students with the support staff they need? Students at risk need many more opportunities. Educators are concerned that the government is in fact lowering the bar. Subject teachers, student success teachers and support staff work hard to meet the needs of all our students, particularly those students who are deemed at risk. It would be really easy for the educators in this province to line up and applaud these numbers and take credit; why wouldn't they take credit for what appears to be student success? But they are not doing that; they are doing the exact opposite.

Over the past year, the OSSTF has had serious concerns about what passes for student success in this province. An OSSTF work group on credit integrity felt it was essential to define real versus artificial student success.

The OSSTF has requested a couple of things: All credit courses should be taught by certified teachers; all marks, grades and credits should be true and accurate indicators of student achievement; the subject teacher shall be consulted when principals—not the teacher, but principals—are considering a mark change for a student.

When the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation feels that these things have to be put in writing,

then we have a problem in this province, and it's a problem that will not go away simply because the government trots out some self-serving numbers. There are questions being asked, and while these questions are being asked, we have real concerns that your numbers may be less a measure of success and more a way of hiding failure.

These numbers announcements are not going to take the place of real alternative programs, adequate special education services, adult education spaces and more supports in the classroom. These are the important things we need to really change the education system in this province and ensure that it is student success we're focusing on, not government success, not government numbers games. That is not the way to make students succeed in this province.

You should stop playing the numbers game and make sure that Ontario's school boards have the resources they need to actually deliver real excellence in the education system in this province. That's what Ontarians expect, that's what parents expect and that is the very least, I would put to this minister, that students in secondary education in this province deserve.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Michael Prue: In response to the Minister of Research and Innovation, I stand here to applaud Dr. Nagy and the wonderful work that was done around the creation of stem cells. I applaud that research because I think this is the cutting edge of science, and it has been delayed far too long. I know there have been ethical issues in the past about where stem cells traditionally were received and how they were received, but this is an opportunity that he has brought forward in science to grow the stem cells from human skin.

The possibilities now are enormous and the ethical dilemma that many people may have had over the use of stem cells and stem cell research has now come full circle, and I think that it's a great day.

PETITIONS

ROUTE 17

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Cette pétition provient de la région de Glengarry-Prescott-Russell.

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que la route 17/174 a besoin d'être élargie à quatre voies, de la rue Trim à la route régionale Prescott-Russell 8 afin d'améliorer la sécurité routière;

« Attendu que la route 17/174 a été reconnue par le passé pour sa condition dangereuse ainsi que le taux d'accidents annuel notable;

« Attendu que cette route représente la principale voie d'accès à la capitale nationale pour la population ouvrière

de Clarence-Rockland, Alfred et Plantagenet et Hawkesbury;

« Attendu que les comtés unis de Prescott-Russell ont manifesté leur intérêt à effectuer une étude environnementale destinée à l'agrandissement de la route 17/174 en passant une résolution au conseil;

« Attendu que la ville d'Ottawa a passé une résolution au conseil demandant soit à la province ou aux comtés unis de Prescott-Russell de prendre l'initiative de l'étude environnementale pour la route 17/174;

« Attendu que le gouvernement fédéral et le gouvernement provincial se sont tous deux engagés à fournir 40 \$ millions pour l'élargissement de la route 17/174;

« Nous, soussignés, adressons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario la pétition suivante :

« Nous demandons que les fonds nécessaires soient alloués aux comtés unis de Prescott-Russell afin de réaliser l'évaluation environnementale obligatoire à l'élargissement de la route 17/174 de deux à quatre voies, du chemin Trim à la route régionale Prescott-Russell 8. »

J'y ajoute ma signature.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition from Jack Logan, Laura O'Neill, Joanne Ritchie, Jim Park and Scott Mooney, just to name a few of the people who have signed it. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the recently passed Bill 41 with regard to speed limiters on every truck was passed without considering the effects on traffic flow safety concerns and interstate trucking; and

"Whereas the speed of 105 kilometres per hour creates a dangerous situation on our 400-series highways with consideration to the average speed of traffic flow being 120 kilometres per hour;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislature suspend the enforcement of the speed limiter law until the Legislature can review all studies conducted pertaining to the effect of this law on road safety; and

"That the Ontario speed limiter law be amended from 105 kilometres per hour to 120 kilometres per hour to remove the increased risk of collisions on our highways and to prevent infringement on interstate trucking out of province and out of country."

I'm pleased to present this petition in support and I present it to Tariq.

TUITION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have these multiple signatures on a petition given to me by a Mr. Eric Blondin from the Fédération canadienne des étudiantes et étudiants. They held a "freeze the fees," which is basically the students slept outside for two nights—48 hours—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It's a petition, not a statement.

M^{me} France G  linas: —to present their petition to me. It reads as follows:

"Whereas undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have increased by 195% since 1990 and are the third-highest in all of the provinces in Canada; and

"Whereas average student debt in Ontario has skyrocketed by 250% in the last 15 years to over \$25,000 for four years of study; and

"Whereas international students pay three to four times more for the same education, and domestic students in professional programs such as law or medicine pay as much tuition as \$20,000 per year; and

"Whereas 70% of new jobs require post-secondary education, and fees reduce the opportunity for many low- and middle-income families while magnifying barriers for aboriginal, rural, racialized and other marginalized students; and

"Whereas Ontario currently provides the lowest per capita funding for post-secondary education in Canada, while many countries fully fund higher education and charge little or no fees for college and university; and

"Whereas public opinion polls show that nearly three quarters of Ontarians think the government's Reaching Higher framework for tuition fee increases of 20% to 36% over four years is unfair;

"We petition the assembly as follows:

"(1) Reduce tuition and ancillary fees annually for all students.

"(2) Convert a portion of every student loan into a grant.

"(3) Increase per student funding above the national average."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk with page Alexander.

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LUPUS

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to support my seat-mate, the member for Niagara Falls, with this petition that has been sent to the Legislative Assembly by Deb Duval of Nesbitt Drive in Sudbury. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media

campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

On behalf of the member for Niagara Falls, I'm pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Emily to carry it for me.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with the Burk's Falls health centre. It reads:

"Whereas the Burk's Falls and District Health Centre provides vital health services for residents of Burk's Falls and the Almaguin Highlands of all ages, as well as seasonal residents and tourists; and

"Whereas the health centre helps to reduce demand on the Huntsville hospital emergency room; and

"Whereas the operating budget for Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is insufficient to meet the growing demand for service in the communities of Muskoka–East Parry Sound; and

"Whereas budget pressures could jeopardize continued operation of the Burk's Falls health centre.

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government and Minister of Health provide adequate increases in the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to maintain current health services, including those provided by the Burk's Falls health centre."

I support this petition.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontarians are angry over the volatility of the MPAC tax assessment system, the near impossibility to predict one's assessment or to understand how it is arrived at, the patent unfairness of assessments and that the current system leaves many homeowners worried they may be forced to sell their homes; and

"Whereas changes are needed that will make Ontario's property tax system stable, understandable, fair, and sensitive to homeowners; and

"Whereas property assessments in Parkdale–High Park have risen between 28% and 45% between 2005 and 2008;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: Support the 'freeze till sale' plan to bring fairness to Ontario's property tax system so that new assessments happen only at the time of sale and when a building permit is obtained for renovations totalling more than \$40,000."

I couldn't agree more, affix my signature and give it to Reed to take down to the Clerk.

SALES TAX

Mr. Pat Hoy: "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the auto industry in Ontario and throughout North America is experiencing a major restructuring; and

"Whereas the current economic crisis is affecting the auto manufacturers and the front-line dealerships throughout Ontario; and

"Whereas many potential automobile purchasers are having difficulty accessing credit even at current prices; and

"Whereas a three-month tax holiday of the GST and the PST on the purchase of new and used cars and trucks would stimulate auto sales;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the provincial and federal governments to implement a three-month tax holiday, and that the Ontario Minister of Finance include the PST holiday in the next provincial budget."

It's signed by a number of persons from Comber, Harrow, Chatham, Belle River and Tilbury, and I too have signed it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition—thousands of them, I might add—from the community of Durham. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the municipality of Clarington passed resolution C-049-09 in support of Lakeridge Health Bowmanville; and

"Whereas area doctors, hospital staff and citizens have raised concerns that Bowmanville's hospital could turn into little more than a site to stabilize and transfer patients for treatment outside the municipality; and

"Whereas Clarington is a growing community of over 80,000 people"—soon to be home to the new nuclear reactors—"and

"Whereas we support the continuation of the Lakeridge Bowmanville site through access to on-site services, including emergency room, internal medicine and general surgery;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the McGuinty government take the necessary action to fund our hospital equitably and fairly. And furthermore, we request that the clinical services plan of the Central East Local Health Integrated Network address the need for the Bowmanville hospital to continue to offer a complete range of services appropriate for" a growing community in Durham region.

I'm pleased to sign and support this and present it to Andrej.

PROPERTY TAXATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'ai cette pétition de M^{me} Evelyn Dutrisac, conseillère de la ville du Grand

Sudbury, et des membres du réseau d'action de son quartier. It reads as follows:

"Whereas 2009 is a reassessment year in the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas the assessments will be phased in over a four-year period from 2009 to 2012; and

"Whereas the assessed values for current value assessments collected as at January 1, 2008, were obtained during years of high real estate activity in the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas the downturn in the current global economic climate has greatly affected the real estate market, and subsequently, the assessed values in the province of Ontario..."

They ask the Legislative Assembly:

"That the Minister of Finance for the province of Ontario roll back assessed values to the base year of January 1, 2005."

I support this petition, will affix my name to it, and send it to the table with page Patrick.

PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY FRANCHISE

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a petition signed by people from Mount Hope, Milton, Hamilton, Burlington and Stoney Creek. It says:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment has the highest average ticket revenue per game in the National Hockey League; and

"Whereas the Toronto Maple Leafs are ranked the most financially valuable team in the NHL; and

"Whereas many Hamilton and greater Toronto area hockey fans are unable to attend professional hockey games due to a lack of adequate ticket supply; and

"Whereas the Hamilton and greater Toronto area boast the biggest and best market in the world for hockey fans, with Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment bringing approximately \$2.4 billion to the local economy over 10 years; and

"Whereas a new franchise in the Hamilton and greater Toronto area is valued at \$600 million by some economists; and

"Whereas competition in both business and sports is healthy for both the Hamilton and greater Toronto area economy and sports team performance; and

"Whereas despite having the most loyal fans in the world, the Toronto Maple Leafs have not won the Stanley Cup in over 40 years; and

"Whereas Hamilton and greater Toronto area fans deserve competitive professional hockey teams;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To request that the government of the province of Ontario express its strong support to the board of governors of the National Hockey League for the relocation or expansion of a second NHL hockey team in the Hamilton and greater Toronto area in order to realize the economic advantages to the taxpayers of the province

of Ontario and to provide healthy competition to the existing Toronto NHL franchise.”

I agree with this petition, obviously, and will sign it and give it to Alexander to take down.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Milton District Hospital was designed to serve a population of 30,000” and the town of Milton is now home to more than 75,000 “people and is still growing rapidly; and

“Whereas the town of Milton is the fastest-growing town in Canada and was forced into that rate of growth by an act of the Ontario Legislature called ‘Places to Grow’; and

“Whereas the town of Milton is projected to have a population of 101,600 people in 2014, which is the earliest date an expansion could be completed; and

“Whereas the current Milton facility is too small to accommodate Milton’s explosive growth and parts of the hospital prohibit the integration of new outpatient clinics and diagnostic technologies;

“Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure timely approval and construction of the expansion to Milton District Hospital.”

I approve of this petition. I’ll sign my name to it and pass it to Jacob, my page.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It’s been sent to me by Hongwei Zhao, of Britannia Road West in my own riding of Mississauga–Streetsville, and reads as follows:

“Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

“Whereas ‘day surgery’ procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to ‘day surgery’ procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed.”

I am pleased to sign and support this petition, and ask page Rachel to carry it for me.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREEN ENERGY AND GREEN ECONOMY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR L'ÉNERGIE VERTE ET L'ÉCONOMIE VERTE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 3, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 150, An Act to enact the Green Energy Act, 2009 and to build a green economy, to repeal the Energy Conservation Leadership Act, 2006 and the Energy Efficiency Act and to amend other statutes / Projet de loi 150, Loi édictant la Loi de 2009 sur l'énergie verte et visant à développer une économie verte, abrogeant la Loi de 2006 sur le leadership en matière de conservation de l'énergie et la Loi sur le rendement énergétique et modifiant d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I’m very pleased today to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 150, An Act to enact the Green Energy Act, 2009 and to build a green economy, to repeal the Energy Conservation Leadership Act, 2006 and the Energy Efficiency Act and to amend other statutes.

Today, as a member of Her Majesty’s loyal opposition, it is my responsibility to point out the flaws and shortcomings in this legislation, and to speak on behalf of all Ontarians who have expressed concerns, asked questions and want to know that their concerns and questions will be addressed by this government.

Although I support green energy, I am concerned not only about the lack of detail in this bill, but also the details that may be buried in this bill and the haste to pass this bill by the government, without extensive consultation with stakeholders and the public.

If we take a look at the media, it’s obvious there are concerns. From the Ottawa Citizen: “The Premier’s new green energy plan is just a badly planned distraction from Ontario’s worsening economic outlook.” If we take a look at the National Post, “The Province’s Green Energy Plan Is Turning Ontario into a Green Police State,” and if we take a look at the Hamilton Spectator, “Green Audits Won’t Work.”

It’s obvious: The public should be entitled to answers from this government.

I have to question whether this government, in bringing forward this bill and acting so hastily, has taken the time to ask the tough questions. I wonder whether they have done the necessary in-depth analysis about the impact and how they plan to implement this bill, or is this energy bill, as some suggest, more about the McGuinty government seeking to associate with the icon of appearing green?

We do know that Premier McGuinty so little understood Ontario energy needs that in the 2003 election he

irresponsibly, without a plan, promised to close Ontario's coal-powered plants by 2007. To date, the only government to close a plant was our government when we closed Lakeview.

We also know that the Minister of Energy and the Premier have indicated they have no idea how the 50,000 jobs that they're promising will be created. But if they hearken back to the real world, Ontario, in January alone, lost 71,000 jobs.

We also know that the Minister of Energy and the Premier have no answers when it comes to targets, electrical rates or the cost of this plan for consumers and businesses. They seem to forget that the Ontario economy depends on a secure supply of affordable energy that will enable us to compete with our neighbouring American states. That is critical if we are to retain jobs in Ontario.

However, since I only have 10 minutes, let me put some concerns and unanswered questions about the bill on the table. I will not deal with the issue of the erosion of democratic rights or the loss of local participation in decisions that directly impact the communities affected by the act. I will not deal with the mandatory \$300 energy audit, which must be reconsidered since it imposes another layer of bureaucracy that will cost homeowners money. Other people are doing that, and they will do so effectively.

I want to go back, again, to whether or not this government and this Premier asked the tough questions or did the necessary in-depth analysis about the impact of the changes proposed in this bill.

As health critic, I want to look first at the health risks of wind turbines. Bill 150 does not address health concerns. It is a bizarre omission. The health of Ontarians should surely be mainstreamed in all government policy decisions, particularly those where the potential impacts are either obvious or widely reported by independent professionals with expertise.

Let's take a look at what Dr. Nina Pierpont said: "I can tell you, definitely and unequivocally, that wind turbines of the size you are contemplating do, in fact, cause harm to human health when placed within two kilometres of peoples' homes." There is no peer-reviewed scientific report written by a certified clinician that disputes Dr. Pierpont's conclusions. Indeed, her research findings are supported by eminent research scientists, academics and medical bodies around the world, and I have the list here.

Extensive research on the health and safety effects of wind turbines confirms that noise from turbines can be heard up to two kilometres away and can induce sleep disturbance, depression, chronic stress, migraines, nausea and memory loss. Dr. Robert McMurtry, former dean of medicine at the University of Western Ontario, points out that the Ontario environment ministry's existing regulations regarding acceptable noise levels are flawed, as they fail to measure low-frequency noise. He states, "It is not possible to develop authoritative guidelines for setbacks of wind turbines if low-frequency noise is not taken into account."

So we have the Premier making pronouncements that there aren't any health concerns related to industrial wind

turbines. However, in saying so, his pronouncement flies in the face of worldwide evidence to the contrary. The World Health Organization states: "It is important to promote the development and the application of health impact assessments in the energy field."

So I go back to where I started. Why has this government not taken action to ensure that the health concerns in this bill are addressed? Why are there no provincial standards for wind turbine setbacks? In Germany and Denmark, setback distances are typically between 1.5 and two kilometres. Would it not be negligent on the part of the government to proceed with the construction of industrial wind turbines without establishing setback standards based on a full epidemiological study of the health risks and the impacts as recommended by Dr. McMurtry, the former dean of medicine at the University of Western Ontario?

Another question that needs to be answered is whether wind power really is that green, or even a viable economic alternative to other renewable energy options. Has the McGuinty government examined the European experience, where wind power has been in existence for a decade or more? Unfortunately, the evidence is mounting that wind power has not delivered on its promise. We know that Denmark is the world's most wind-intensive nation, with more than 6,000 turbines generating 19% of its electricity. But, apparently, not one fossil fuel power plant has closed, 50% more coal-generated electricity is needed to cover wind failings, pollution and carbon dioxide emissions rose 36% in 2006 alone, and Danish electricity costs are higher than in Ontario.

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And what are the Danes saying about wind power now? "Windmills are a mistake and economically make no sense," says Niels Gram, Danish Federation of Industries. "Wind turbines do not reduce carbon dioxide emissions," says Flemming Nissen, head of Denmark's largest energy utility.

In fact, *Der Spiegel*, in Germany, says this about the German plants: Germany's "CO₂ emissions haven't been reduced by even a single gram," despite all their wind turbines. In fact, Germany has had to build many more coal- and gas-fired plants.

As you can see, when we take a look at this bill, there are many unanswered questions and concerns. Time does not allow for me to raise any more at this time, but I would recommend that this government go back and ask the tough questions that you have refused to ask thus far. Do the in-depth analysis of the health risks associated with wind turbine setbacks. Determine whether wind power is really that green or even a viable economical alternative to other options.

Unless and until those questions are answered and that analysis is completed, it would be irresponsible to support this bill. People in this province deserve answers. I trust that this government will take the time to get it right. I hope there will be extensive consultations and amendments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I listened carefully to my colleague from the Conservative Party. I want to say that while I do not necessarily agree with everything she has said in her comments, she does raise some questions that the McGuinty Liberals are very reluctant to answer. She raises some questions that I think are very worrisome for individual homeowners and people who are thinking about residential electricity. She especially raises some very troublesome questions, I think, for the manufacturing sector.

One of the realities of Ontario's economy is that the manufacturing sector needs affordable electricity if they're going to continue to operate in Ontario. Indeed, I think we can already see some things happening: ZENN cars—electric cars. It's an Ontario company, but they have chosen to do their manufacturing in Quebec. Why have they chosen to do their manufacturing in Quebec? One of the reasons: affordable electricity.

Let me give you another example. This is office paper; hundreds of thousands of tonnes of office paper are utilized in Ontario virtually every week, but no office paper is produced in Ontario any longer. A company like Domtar has 10 mills—in Tennessee, Kentucky, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Wisconsin and Quebec—but no longer produces office paper in Ontario. Why? The industrial hydro rate. And the government refuses to answer those questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to offer my comments on the member from Kitchener–Waterloo. One of the real issues behind this—there are many improvements in providing the proper electricity to our great province, but renewables and conservation are at the centre of this, and conservation is energy number one. We all know that. So this bill includes many things.

One of the things I'd like to talk about is local investments. Part of this bill will be community assistance facilitation, which will support community investments in providing small-scale grants in support of soft costs—engineering and legal—for renewables and conservation, and retrofits were part of that. We have certain initiatives in this bill that will have to be defined—the health concerns that this member has brought up—but that will be part of developing the regulations under this bill, so that has some time. It will be going to committee, and obviously it will have good input from around the table.

We're looking at really improving the conditions in Ontario to let the bio-gas energy come in, to let the wind energy to come in. One thing: Solar energy, all those flat roofs in a city like Toronto, has been mentioned by the minister a few times, and that is certainly energy that we can use and recoup efficiently in this province.

For many reasons, this bill, with the major investment in the grid and making that grid available, is getting us ready for five years or 10 years down the road when that grid will be needed for electric cars. This is a modern approach, this is a good approach, and this bill will do that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to address the comments made by our deputy leader, Mrs. Witmer, the member for Kitchener–Waterloo. I would remind this chamber that in 2001 it was under her leadership as Minister of Environment that an implementation plan was put forward to eliminate and close the only coal-fired plant in this province. It's a statistic and it's a fact that those opposite would like to forget. They don't like to talk about it much because, quite frankly, they failed to act on the environment and in our energy crisis since they've been elected.

This piece of legislation is very disconcerting. Not only are there plans that are unachievable and based on issues that we think are grabbed out of thin air—i.e. the jobs they believe they will create; it has serious economic and consumer-related challenges that have not been addressed by the McGuinty government. A number of different statutes and acts will be amended as a result of this piece of legislation, and it is not clear to the official opposition that the ministers responsible for those pieces of legislation or those ministers whose portfolios will be impacted have been adequately briefed on the impacts. I can tell you that, in my 10 minutes that will be coming up in the next rotation, I will focus on some of the consumer protection issues that will arise. These are very serious concerns that we in the official opposition have. That is why we asked this government to put this legislation before the people of Ontario before we had this debate. It is an omnibus bill and it needs to be treated as such.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I think many of us and the member from Waterloo certainly forgets what happened on August 14, 2003. Fifty million people ended up with no lights, totally in the dark, and that was during the watch of her party because they weren't paying attention to energy. They weren't pay attention to transmission. They let things basically go to seed. They talk about the economic impact or the environmental impact: When you ignore something as fundamental as energy production, conservation and transmission, you not only suffer environmentally; you suffer economically.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: There's the member from Kenora–Rainy River. When he had a chance to extend the hydro line from Conawapa, he said no and he closed it down. We could have had clean electric power from Manitoba, and there the member from Kenora–Rainy River was so forward-looking that he said, "No, we're not going to extend that power from Manitoba and Conawapa." He's the one who killed Conawapa, and he has the nerve to stand here and lambaste reliance on nuclear. He's the one who pushed more nuclear down our throats, because he closed Conawapa. He closed that renewable, green hydro power from Manitoba. If we had had that power from Manitoba, we would not have had the blackout in 2003. That's on the member from Rainy River's legacy: He

killed Conawapa; he put us back 20 years by killing Conawapa. People will never forget what he did.

Interjections.

1410

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It used to be quiet in here before the change in NDP leadership. Nevertheless—

Mr. Howard Hampton: On a point of order, Speaker: I'm upset when I see Liberals stabbing a good Liberal like Bob Rae like that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): That's not a point of order, but I probably drew that out of you.

Member for Kitchener–Waterloo, you have two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I want to thank the members for Kenora–Rainy River, Ottawa–Orléans and Nepean–Carleton, and I would take exception to the comments by the member for Eglinton–Lawrence. For him to suggest that the power brownout in 2003—

Mr. Mike Colle: Blackout.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer:—blackout; whatever you want to call it—was our responsibility, when the whole world watching knew that it originated in the United States, shows you how preposterous are the statements being made by the government. In fact, it leads you to question even more whether this government ever asked any of the tough questions related to this bill, whether they ever did the in-depth analysis.

As I said in my remarks, your Premier made a very irresponsible commitment in 2003 to close the coal plants without any plan. I can tell you personally, as Minister of the Environment, that the only reason the coal plant at Lakeview closed was because we made an announcement that was based on an in-depth analysis; there was a plan of action with targets. We are proud of the initiative—the action we took—because the only coal plant that has ever been closed is the one we closed at Lakeview, and we take credit for that, because we had a plan.

You've never had a plan. You continue to make irresponsible announcements, and then the plants are going to close in 2009. Who knows when it will ever happen? It's just like today: You're proposing that all this good is going to happen; however, you have no answers about how the 50,000 jobs will be created, what the rates will be, what the price of power is going to be for consumers and business. This government is out of touch. They never do the analysis that is needed.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you to everyone. Further debate?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'm very pleased to take part in this debate, especially at this juncture.

I want to remind the member for Eglinton–Lawrence that it was someone named Dalton McGuinty who was all in favour of privatizing the grid, selling off Hydro One. If he wants to see it, I'll be glad to show him the video clip again and I'd be glad to show him the press clippings again. When you stand up and try to pretend that somehow Liberals are the protectors of public power,

please, just go and read your own press clippings. It's there in black and white.

I want to talk some more as well about why this bill at this time? The reason we see this bill at this time is because the real electricity policy of the McGuinty Liberals is to go nuclear—go big. If you want to see what the real electricity policy is, there's a rule: Follow the money. You cannot produce electricity unless you make capital investments. Now, the McGuinty Liberals would want the people across Ontario to believe that billions of dollars will be invested in green energy. But if you follow the money, the fact is that the billion-dollar investments, the multi-billion dollar investments, are not going to happen in green energy; the multi-billion dollar investments are going to happen on the nuclear front. The McGuinty Liberals say, "Oh, \$26 billion." I invite Ontarians at home to call up their local electricity utility and ask them how much they believe the nuclear program as proposed by the McGuinty Liberals will cost, and they will say, "If the McGuinty Liberals are saying \$26 billion, then multiply by two. It will be at least \$50 billion, if not more." So the real electricity policy of this government is to go nuclear and go big—go very big. What that will mean is huge costs on the hydro bill.

But the McGuinty Liberals don't want to talk about that, so they're looking for something to hide behind; they are looking for something to throw out there and say, "Don't think about the massive spending on nuclear power. We've got something else over here."

But what is in this bill? Well, the government says, and I find it interesting, that there are stronger building code standards. The government doesn't need a bill to change the building code. The building code is set in regulation. The McGuinty Liberals could go into a cabinet meeting tomorrow and say, "We're upgrading and updating and making the building code stronger so that if people are going to build apartments or duplexes or triplexes or homes, they will have to build according to a higher energy efficiency standard." No legislation is required for that.

They say this bill deals with more efficient government buildings. You don't need a piece of legislation to require government buildings to be more energy-efficient. The government, when it puts out tenders for a contract, can simply say, "This building will be built according to these energy efficiency standards." If you want to do things like rely on geothermal heating, you can make it part of the contract. If you want to install solar panels on top of a government building, you can make it part of the contract. If you want the building constructed such that it has the structural stability to be able to support a wind turbine on the 21st floor, you make it part of the contract. You don't need legislation to do that. You simply make it part of the contract.

Then it says more energy-efficient appliances. Once again, energy efficiency as it applies to appliances is set down in regulation. This government could go into a cabinet meeting tomorrow and come out and say, "You're no longer allowed to sell refrigerators or freezers or cooking

stoves or other electrical appliances unless they meet the energy efficiency standards already established by California.” These products are already being manufactured; they are being manufactured for that huge California market. You don’t need to have legislation.

So if you don’t need to have legislation, if this could all be done by cabinet regulation, why is this bill here? This bill is here for one simple reason. This bill is nine parts smokescreen. It is nine parts media relations and public relations and only about one part substance. Why this smokescreen? Once again, the desperate attempt by the McGuinty Liberals to hide the fact that their real electricity agenda, their only electricity agenda, is to go nuclear and go big—very big, \$50-billion big, huge-increases-in-the-hydro-bill big, huge-increases-in-the-debt big—and people will be paying for generations and generations.

The government says, again, you need this in order to establish a “culture of conservation.” They’ve been using this term “culture of conservation” for about six years. In fact, residential electricity use is increasing. The only thing that is decreasing in the province is industrial use of electricity. Every once in a while they put out a press release saying, “We’ve achieved incredible electricity efficiency.” No; another 10,000 workers got laid off. That’s what’s really happening. I’ve never seen a government celebrate the loss of so many thousands of manufacturing jobs and then try to pretend that it’s energy efficiency. When a paper mill shuts down, that’s not energy efficiency; that’s the loss of thousands of jobs, and it’s the loss, in many cases, of the whole economic base of a community. When Stelco shuts down and 2,100 workers in Hamilton are given pink slips, I have to tell the McGuinty Liberals: That is not energy efficiency; that is an economic disaster.

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You don’t need legislation to implement practical energy efficiency programs. This government today could announce that it’s going to provide every Ontarian who wants to purchase a state-of-the-art, energy-efficient fridge with a \$500 or \$1,000 low-interest loan and then allow people to pay back the loan based upon how much they save every month on their hydro bill. We know that the most up-to-date energy efficient fridge uses only about a third of the electricity of a refrigerator that’s 10 or 15 years old. You don’t have to have a new bureaucracy going around and hunting in people’s basements. You don’t have to be conducting searches and inspections. People want to do the right thing. But a lot of people in this province don’t have the extra \$2,000 or \$3,000 of cash to go out and purchase that energy efficient fridge. They need a loan, preferably a low-interest loan, and they can make the purchase. But do we see that? No, we don’t see that.

Similarly—and I invite all the people at home to do this—Manitoba has a very effective energy efficiency strategy. The NDP government in Manitoba has a very effective energy efficiency strategy. It provides very big, long-term loans so that people can go out and do things like purchase energy-efficient windows, energy-efficient

doors, energy-efficient appliances, super-energy-efficient natural gas furnaces, and you pay the loan back not out of your pocket but based upon how much money you save on your heating bill every month and how much money you save on your electricity bill every month. Six or seven years after you’ve paid back the loan, here’s what’s happened: You’ve done the right thing for the environment, you’ve done the right thing in terms of your home and gee, you’ve also done the right thing in terms of your pocketbook.

Do we see a strategy like that from the McGuinty Liberals? Nope. No strategy. Instead, they want to create a new bureaucracy to go out and hunt around in people’s homes—“Aha, you’ve got an energy-efficient fridge in your basement.” This bill is nine parts superficiality, nine parts media spin, and only about one part substance. I believe that the people of Ontario deserve better. When industrial hydro rates are closing mill after mill, factory after factory, and when low-income people can’t afford to pay their hydro bills, people deserve something better than this from the government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier) Questions and comments? The member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Following a well-reputed author on electricity issues, I feel somewhat taken aback. But I would like to just point out that the Green Energy Act will be important to the constituents I represent. First of all, we have, and are proud to say, the largest wind farm in all of Canada, in Prince township just on the edge of Sault Ste. Marie. It is something that my constituents believe is good for the environment. But we need to be able to move electricity. I think the member would understand that. We do need better distribution. Our distribution system in Ontario needs considerable upgrades, and a great part of this act is providing the opportunity to improve the distribution of lines in a timely fashion across Ontario so we can move. The Schneider people on Manitoulin island are looking to be able to build more than the three present wind turbines that they have, but they need to be able to move that electricity beyond the district of Manitoulin, beyond places like Killarney, and into the grid to make those kinds of investments viable. Those are the highways of electricity, and the member clearly would favour an improvement in distribution and he would know that in—

Mr. Howard Hampton: You don’t need a bill to do that.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: The bill actually does assist to do that. The member knows that also.

I represent a constituency that at one time employed 4,000 people in the uranium mines of Elliot Lake. He can be proud to say that his government, the one that he supported, went and put 4,000 steelworkers out of work overnight in Elliott Lake. He might also want to tell my constituents in Blind River who worked for Cameco that they aren’t part of it. And he would like to tell the Legislature about completing the largest nuclear—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

Questions and comments?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I do appreciate the opportunity to comment briefly on the remarks made by the member from Kenora–Rainy River. Perhaps surprisingly, I do agree with quite a lot of what he had to say. Although I come to a different conclusion ultimately, I do agree with him that the people of Ontario do deserve better than what they're getting with this bill, that a lot of it is just a lot of dreams and hope and a lot of supposition and trying to convince the people of Ontario that all of a sudden, with the snap of a finger, we're going to have green energy throughout the land.

Of course, it's not going to happen that way, and that's one of the biggest things that we as Progressive Conservatives take issue with. There's no plan here and no idea about how we're going to integrate the development of nuclear power, which we still rely on for 50% of the power in this province and which we're going to need if we're going to try and develop the kinds of industries and businesses that we need to replace the lost jobs here.

If we're going to continue to innovate and grow the economy of this province, we need to have a reliable supply of energy, and that's not what we're seeing with this bill; we're just seeing one small piece of it. Of course, who wouldn't want to believe in green energy? We certainly do encourage the development of alternative energy sources, but that's not going to be fully developed for a number of years. In the meantime, we need to carry on business and we don't have a plan. We don't know how that aligns with the development of nuclear power. We also don't know how that aligns with the closing of the coal-fired plants.

Quite frankly, we've heard that promise before. We heard it for 2007; now we're hearing it for 2014. Whether that's actually going to happen is a matter of speculation at this point. We haven't heard anything definitive on that point, and really, it's something that we as Progressive Conservatives advocated some years ago, to put those scrubbers on the coal-fired plants to keep them going and to eliminate some of the health-related concerns that so many people in this province have. But it hasn't happened, and we don't know from this bill what is going to happen. The government needs to get its act together and give us a full plan.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's an absolute honour and a pleasure to welcome the member from Kenora–Rainy River to the House business of the afternoon. We haven't been blessed by that in the past.

The member is absolutely correct. This bill is a piece of greenwashing. There was a name—"greenwashing"—developed to describe exactly what this bill is. Those who are in the environmental movement recognize immediately what it is. They have come out with one voice, from David Suzuki to Greenpeace to Pembina, saying that there's not going to be the money for renewable and to please stop this rush to go big and go nuclear. Fifty billion dollars is the single, biggest expense this province will ever put out there. If anybody out there who's

watching thinks that this is going to mean a lot of new wind farms and a lot of new renewable energy projects, they are incorrect. Because to put this in perspective, over the next 20 years, according to this bill, Ontario will install less than one fifth the solar panels that Germany has put up in one year. Remember, Germany is the country that has 30%-plus in wind power already. So there's no need to wait; the technology in fact is there.

In 2027, according to this plan, Ontario will have less wind capacity than the state of Texas already has today. By any standards, that's pathetic. Again, a Liberal spin bill that's meant for the media and not meant to put renewable energy into action, that gives it crumbs rather than substance, that would be—maybe not; just the order of the day, quite frankly. But in fact our planet's at risk, as well as the province of Ontario. We know they can do better, and they should.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Pat Hoy: I guess my first comment would be for all members of the House to remember that we have extended the PST exemption on energy-efficient appliances. We're playing a role in many aspects of energy use and consumption, and providing for energy into the future.

Bill 150 will make it easier to bring renewable energy products to life. It's a vehicle that would allow for that. There will be great jobs coming out of this: domestic manufacturing—as part of the content of the bill and its future once it's passed—assembly, architecture, construction, trucking, installation, financing, engineering, electricians, inspectors, computer software, and the list goes on and on.

On Friday, Minister Papatello; Minister Duncan; the member for Essex, who's here with us now; and myself, along with many others, hosted an alternative manufacturing summit. We were hoping that perhaps 300 people would attend that meeting and hear from people who are involved, and experts in wind, solar and, indeed, nuclear. We were hoping for 300 people, and 800 persons came. They were looking for the job opportunities that will flow from Bill 150. They're going to make component parts, they will be involved in construction and they're looking for their opportunity to be part of what is a new future in energy use and consumption here in Ontario.

As an example, I have wind farms in my riding. It has been beneficial to the landowners, who in many cases are farmers, but it's not exclusive to farmers who own land. It has been beneficial to the municipality in terms of the tax that is paid to them in property taxes, and there have been jobs flowing from this. So this bill just enhances what we've started. It's going to give us great opportunities in energy in the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Kenora–Rainy River, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I do want to respond. I want to say to the member for Algoma-Manitoulin that if the McGuinty Liberals want to reopen the uranium mines in Elliot Lake, I invite you to make that announcement, because you know and I know that those uranium mines were heavily subsidized—unbelievably subsidized. If the McGuinty government wants to go down that road again of paying four or five times the existing price of uranium, then you make that announcement. Otherwise, if you're not prepared to make that announcement, I suggest that you leave the issue alone.

I want to address some of the other points here, and one is this: Quebec has a 60%-Quebec-content rule when it comes to green energy projects. So someone who wants to construct wind turbines in Quebec understands that they've got to do 60% of the work in Quebec. The result? There is now a wind turbine facility in Quebec. Similarly, someone who wants to participate in terms of the solar energy industry in Quebec has to do 60% of the work in Quebec. The result? You have new plants opening in Quebec to produce components for solar electricity.

Quebec has been very clear: 60% Quebec inputs. I searched this bill from top to bottom, backwards and forward, looking for that. Do you think you can find it? No; you can't find it. There is no requirement. I remember, just a short while ago, the then Minister of Northern Development promising that there was going to be a wind turbine plant in Sault Ste. Marie. I invite McGuinty Liberals to go and see if you can—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

ROYAL ASSENT SANCTION ROYALE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to a certain bill in his office.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The following is the title of the bill to which His Honour did assent:

Bill 103, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and to make amendments to other Acts /
Projet de loi 103, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille et apportant des modifications à d'autres lois.

GREEN ENERGY AND GREEN ECONOMY ACT, 2009 LOI DE 2009 SUR L'ÉNERGIE VERTE ET L'ÉCONOMIE VERTE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: The Green Energy Act is a real paradigm shift. For many years, there's been all kinds of

nibbling at the edges of what we do in terms of a comprehensive energy policy, but the minister, Mr. George Smitherman, has undertaken a comprehensive approach to this. The big shift I've seen in this bill is, for the first time, a government in Ontario has invested a great deal of time and energy and planning in looking at the conservation mix in terms of our energy and investing in enhancing conservation in a systematic way, also in terms of renewables.

For too long, when we've looked at renewable energy, so-called green energy, it has been an ad hoc approach. It's been a piecemeal approach. What this bill does is emphatically state that investment in conservation and renewable energy is an integral part of our energy future here in Ontario, and that is why this is a very complex bill. There are many different component parts. It is a bill that, again, strikes debate in many, many areas, and that's good, because for too long we've talked about conservation. We've been ready to accept it, but this bill, I think, outlines a plan to get there.

The thing that we must go back to is August 14, 2003. Essentially, the power energy system in Ontario and parts of the eastern United States collapsed, and that's because Ontario's system of energy infrastructure, along with that of the northeastern United States, was not up to standard. We took it for granted that those old transmission lines and power generation stations would be able to handle these loads, and we found out in a very stark way that it was not up to acceptable standards.

So, in 2003, people in Ontario, especially southern Ontario, went without power for a couple of days, and they began to realize—I remember people going to gas stations and saying, "Hey, I can't get gas." It soon became very real to them because the gas pumps are electronically run; therefore, without electricity you can't even get gas. We never thought of those implications.

I think it was a wake-up call. That's why our government, since then, has invested massive amounts of money in infrastructure upgrading: our transmission lines and refurbishing many of our power plants. There's also the new Beck tube that's going underneath Niagara Falls, a billion-dollar project, giving us more green power out of Niagara Falls. That's a huge, massive undertaking that's going on right now as we speak, a billion dollars in renewable energy.

This bill also ensures that for the energy projects that are proposed—whether it be for solar farms or wind farms, whether it be for renewable hydro projects, bio-mass generation of power or geothermal projects—there is going to be a streamlining of the approval process. It is beyond belief how slow and cumbersome the process is, and the amount of duplication and time it takes to approve any of these renewable energy projects. This bill attempts to give them much more direct focus so they'll be passed in a reasonable amount of time. There are so many hoops that these projects go through, it's no wonder we have lost so much time. We just have too much bureaucracy, too much delay, too much opportunity to deflect the purpose of good green energy projects in this province. So this bill takes that on head-on,

to get rid of the bureaucratic delays that stop green energy from occurring. That is very, very important.

I look at the city of Toronto itself. There have been transit projects in Toronto and in the GTA for years and years. You have to go through about five years of environmental approvals and planning approvals by about five different levels of government to put a streetcar line on the street that saves the environment, saves money and gets rid of the CO₂ emissions. Even though there's government money ready, it still takes five years to do this. In many parts of the world, these projects take six months, to build subway approvals and to build light rail approval—six months; five years here in Ontario to clean our air, whether it be a transit project or a green energy renewable project. That's what happens, and that costs money and delays.

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The other important thing is in terms of the green-collar jobs. As our economy is being transformed, as the economies in North America and the world are being transformed, it is certainly agreed upon that the new jobs of the future are going to be for people who produce—whether it be wind turbines, solar panels, geothermal devices, on-demand water heaters, insulation technology or new home building, these are the opportunities as we get into this green economy. The bill is an enabler to do that. Right now, there are all these roadblocks where these green jobs can't go online because of the delays and because of the approval process.

The other thing to keep in mind is that these projects being planned right now are now going to be given a priority. In fact, in the act it says that there's now going to be a obligation, if this bill is passed, for the responsible power purchasing authority to grant priority to, and obligatory purchase of, green energy projects. In other words, right now the power authorities don't have to give priority for transmission etc., for green power projects. This will make sure that they give priority to the green energy projects rather than them languishing in the background.

There are so many incredible opportunities for jobs, for cleaning up in our projects—in this bill they refer to projects like green roofs. If you go up high in the city of Toronto, you will see hundreds and thousands of acres of rooftops, all flat, and there's nothing on top of them. Could you imagine, Mr. Speaker, if you had green roofs all across the city of Toronto and the GTA and industrial sites in Mississauga or in downtown Toronto, and all the green roofs had insulation through natural soils and the growing of grasses whereby in the wintertime they would act as insulation, keeping buildings warmer, and in the summertime they would cool buildings, plants and industrial sites? This bill enables that to happen to a greater extent and incents people to do that. We need to utilize these green roofs that are sitting there right now basically being energy pigs because they spew heat out and also keep the cold.

Another great opportunity for jobs is one of my pet projects. In all of our homes across Ontario in our

basements we have these 50-gallon energy pigs. These energy pigs are boiling hot water 24 hours a day. We're not home, yet it's boiling away. It's like leaving the house and leaving a hundred kettles on. Would you leave your house in the morning and leave a hundred kettles on? You wouldn't do that, but we do leave that hot water tank gurgling away. Can you imagine if we replaced those energy pigs in our basement with on-demand water heaters like they've been using in Portugal, Brazil and Guatemala? The whole world uses on-demand water heaters, which could be manufactured in Hamilton, Toronto, in Leamington, providing green jobs for the people of Eastview; they could work producing these on-demand water heaters. Instead, we keep these energy pigs in our basements, boiling away, boiling away, day after day after day so that we can take that one shower in the morning and then wash the dishes at night. And these big kettles boil away.

That's the culture we have to change. This bill begins to change that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I very much look forward to speaking to this a little bit later. Unfortunately, I don't have that much time.

I wanted to make some comments on what the member was speaking about. First of all, on the hot water heater, most people don't realize that 22% of all energy costs in the province of Ontario are associated with the heating of water, whether it's for cooking, cleaning, bathing or other aspects—dishwashers etc.—22% of all costs. There is some technology out there, and I know because I happened to do a pilot project on one where a building actually used the hot water heater to heat the building in the wintertime. What they did was pump the hot water through the building in order to heat all the rooms, and when they wanted hot water, they turned on the hot water, and guess what? It came out. That way, it was being utilized in other fashions. There are some technologies out there that have been in existence for a while, and that's just one of them.

Another one is the flat roofs you spoke about, and what happens there. Most people don't know that the reason they utilize flat roofs is that in the summertime, they collect water. As the sun beats down, it heats up the water and it evaporates into the atmosphere. The theory behind that is that the water actually draws the warmth out of the building; it helps to cool the building by drawing it up to the roof and then evaporating it. It causes a cycle much like a termite mound; that would be an extreme example of how it works.

There are some other things. You talked about the five-year delay process for a lot of stuff. It's the same with all governments of all stripes; we've all had that difficulty. In the province of Ontario, we have some significant components—you mentioned travel or road infrastructure. A lot of that has to go with research that is done, whether it's a simple thing like digging up artifacts to ensure you're not going through a First Nations burial

site when you're putting in a new road, to make sure that is in compliance. We've also got the Ministry of the Environment looking at all these things. A lot of things are happening out there.

The member from Manitoulin mentioned the Sault Ste. Marie aspect. There was a lot of research done by previous governments on that in order to initiate it, which is another example of how you bring these things to happen in five years. But things are happening, and Ontario is getting a lot better.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Let's hear what the people who are in the field, the environmentalists themselves, actually say about this bill. Greenpeace: "The government's 2006 electricity plan caps the development of green energy, so the government could meet its self-imposed target of maintaining nuclear at 50% of supply."

Pembina: "Ontario's electricity plan actually halts construction of new wind turbines in 2018, in order to leave space for the new reactors that the province is ... purchasing."

According to the David Suzuki Foundation, "To be effective in making Ontario a global green energy leader," the government must "avoid new investments in nuclear facilities to avoid 'capping' renewables and efficiency gains due to oversupply from non-renewable sources."

You can't have it both ways. You can't have this huge expenditure on nuclear reactors and give the crumbs over to renewable energy and conservation. It doesn't work that way.

By the way, two University of Western Ontario professors interviewed 63 wind developers. They also say that the act doesn't go far enough because it fails to include long-term targets for renewable capacity and leaves too many decisions to ministers.

We're going nuclear, and as the member from Kenora-Rainy River says, we're going nuclear, we're going big, and that is the real energy policy of this government. This bill is greenwashing to cover up the fact that they know as well as we, in the New Democratic Party, that nuclear reactors are unpopular with a lot of people who are voting in Ontario elections; they're just not popular. They know, unlike the McGuinty Liberals, that a nuclear reactor has a lifespan of 20 years, goes over budget—we're talking \$30 billion to \$50 billion here—and the radioactive waste from the nuclear reactors lasts for thousands of years. Again I say this is greenwashing.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Reza Moridi: I'm pleased to rise in this House and comment on Bill 150, the Green Energy Act. I would like to commend the Minister Smitherman and his staff for preparing and proposing this bill to the Parliament.

Green energy is the thing that is going to change fundamentally energy policy and energy distribution in this province. When we are talking about green energy,

we are not only talking about windmills or solar power; we are talking about other forms of green energy: biomass, biogas, fuel-filled gas, geothermal and other methods of production of green energy.

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In response to the comments made by the member from Kenora-Rainy River and the member from Parkdale-High Park about nuclear reactors, I must mention that there are about 400 nuclear power reactors in operation in the world as we speak, and they have been in operation for the past 60 years. Each reactor doesn't cost \$25 billion, as these members just indicated. They cost much, much less than what they have quoted to this House right now. I suggest that these honourable members ask the operators and builders of those reactors how much they do cost. They cost much, much less than that.

I have been to reactors several times. The nuclear industry is one of the most heavily regulated industries among all industries in the world. It is not a dirty industry; it is actually a clean industry. I recommend that members visit one of these nuclear reactors not very far from Toronto, either at Pickering or Darlington.

This bill, once it is passed, is going to create 50,000 new jobs in various areas of engineering, manufacturing, assembly, installation and so on and so forth. It's going to diversify energy production in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It amazes me that the Liberal member from Eglinton-Lawrence would choose to focus his debate on how it's a great thing that Bill 150 is going to limit the ability of the public to have input on the placement of generation projects. By far the greatest number of conversations, e-mails and phone calls that I have had on Bill 150 are around concerns raised with our municipal partners and the landowners, who are saying, "Why are the Liberals allowing the removal of our input when it comes to placement of turbines?"

It comes out beautifully in an e-mail that I received: "Bill 150 essentially excludes Ontarians from any say in the establishment and location of industrial wind turbine plants. It provides a glaring example of the Liberal government's systematic indifference to the rights and interests of rural Ontarians, and an inexcusable disregard for public health concerns."

The lead-in to that is that after approval is given, there are 15 days for an Ontario resident to appeal one of these approvals to the Environmental Review Tribunal. Fifteen days? You would have to go onto the Environmental Bill of Rights essentially daily to monitor what kind of approval processes have been occurring and how quickly they are going, and then you have a mere 15 days to put together your process and arguments against an approval process.

It's unconscionable to me that that would be what this member and this Liberal government hold up as the beautiful part of Bill 150, and to me is an indication of how little respect they show for homeowners and our municipal partners.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Eglinton–Lawrence, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Mike Colle: I want to thank all the members for their input.

The thing that the last speaker, from Dufferin–Caledon, doesn't understand is that right now, to get an approval for a green energy project or to get an approval for a transit project, you go through provincial liaison, local planning, regional planning. Every ministry has to sign off on it. They're all doing it one after the other. Why not streamline it and let them all do it concurrently?

If the Tories are so interested in creating job opportunities in their ridings, why are they so interested in bureaucratic delay? I'm not talking about doing something in a year, or even two. I just don't think a green energy project should take five years. We're not building a smokestack. We're building a wind turbine; we're putting solar panels on roofs. It shouldn't take five years to get an approval.

You'd think the Tories would be in favour of eliminating red tape; the old Mike Harris Tories talked about that. This one—I'm not sure where she's coming from, but she wants more delay, more excuses. Therefore, we lose jobs?

We desperately need jobs. That's why we need new ideas, and that's why I liked listening to the member from Oshawa, who always has an idea rather than just some negative criticism about everything. The member from Parkdale–High Park is negative about everything. I've never heard her say a positive word in any day she has been here.

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Colle: Once—one positive word. But anyway, sure, this is not a bill that's going to solve everything. But I like the fact that we are discussing ideas. We need to put these ideas into practice. We've been talking about conservation and how good wind turbines are and how good solar panels are. It's about time we started doing it, because there is an environmental imperative that we do it; there's an economic imperative. Climate change is almost here, folks—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Further debate? The member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the opportunity to debate here. May I just move away from my script for one moment. The previous member called my female colleague from Dufferin–Caledon “this one” and he called my female colleague from Parkdale–High Park somebody who is always negative. I think that he should consider his words in targeting the women in our caucuses in the opposition.

Let me stick to my script because I do have grave concerns about this legislation as the official opposition critic for consumer services. This is a power grab. It's also a tax grab, and it could be considered one of the most dangerous pieces of legislation to impact consumer protection in this province's history. I'm disappointed that last week, when asking a question of the minister

responsible for consumer affairs, instead of standing up and answering a question related to consumer issues in this chamber, on this bill, he sat down, he remained silent, he referred the question. It is his responsibility, as Minister of Consumer Services, to stand up and take notice. I think myself and my colleagues in the official opposition, and I imagine my colleagues in the third party, are quite concerned that this is an omnibus bill which will impact several different ministries and several more pieces of legislation.

This legislation is being forced through this chamber without adequate public debate. This bill, this tax and power grab, ought to be approached not only as an energy and environment bill but also as an economic bill. It should be looked at in the context of the current economic climate and what it will mean to the everyday taxpayers, homeowners and of course the consumers who use electricity in this province.

Specifically, this power grab will come at a significant cost to consumers. Let me explain. The cost of Mr. McGuinty's power grab is \$5 billion over three years just to update transmission alone. This means that Ontario's 4.2 million electricity consumers could see a 30% increase in their electricity bills. Home energy audits are a key component of Dalton McGuinty's power grab. This scheme alone will cost homeowners an extra \$300 if they choose to sell their home. Warrant inspections and search and seizure are all aspects of Dalton McGuinty's power grab. The toaster police don't even have to notify a homeowner when applying for a warrant to search and seize energy-inefficient household appliances. Interfering in Dalton McGuinty's energy search-and-seizure scheme is punishable by a fine of up to \$25,000.

We currently pay 5.5 cents for energy, but Mr. McGuinty's power grab will force us to pay for more expensive wind and solar electricity, which could be as much as nine times the price. Mr. McGuinty's power grab creates more expensive government programs that will be passed on to taxpayers by increased monthly bills from their gas and hydro companies. Instead of directly raising taxes, the Green Energy Act will force gas and hydro companies to raise their rates, and consumers will be the ones paying for these Liberal pet projects. Mr. McGuinty's power grab will also increase the size of the bureaucracy by creating one more government agency. It will interfere in decisions made by consumers on the power that they purchase by allowing the government to order any consumer to change their habits. The jobs created by Mr. McGuinty's power will largely be public sector.

This legislation, this power grab, is a threat to consumer protection. It is the worst possible set of policies to be brought forward during an economic downturn. There have been many criticisms on this power grab, ranging from the Ontario Federation of Labour to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. In all, the critics see this power grab for what it is: “A waste of time and money when the province should be focusing on ... the economy,” as the Ottawa Citizen wrote on February 25, 2009.

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Let me share some of the very concerns people across Ontario have over this legislation. Wayne Samuelson of the Ontario Federation of Labour says, "It needs to be part of a ... broader economic package that includes infrastructure spending, support for people who need help..." Mr. Samuelson and I rarely see eye to eye, but I agree with him on this point. At a time of economic distress, I am concerned that hiking rates, raising taxes and growing the bureaucracy are the very last approaches we should take. But also, if you're going to implement any approach of this kind, there needs to be a plan. Instead, this bill is part of a series of one-offs that will only exacerbate the pain that this province is currently going through. For example, Kevin Gaudet of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation says, "It's a new green tax." There may be disagreement about what the best way is to respond to challenging economic times, but the one area on which there is no disagreement is the issue of raising costs, fees and taxes: This is exactly the wrong time.

In a nutshell, this power grab will leave most consumers powerless when dealing with their energy prices, because they are going to skyrocket. One specific measure which has been panned by consumers is the energy efficiency audit, which will cost them at least \$300. This will cost homeowners much more than \$300 on the face value alone. The demand for those people who are offering the audits will increase, but as Gerry Weir of the Ontario Real Estate Association says, "It's not the initial cost of these audits that concerns us. These audits will be used by homebuyers as bargaining chips to significantly reduce the final selling price." This is an important point, because the government of Ontario under Dalton McGuinty has now become a major player in Ontario's real estate market. Caveat emptor, let the buyer beware, because, as Weir points out, "Home sellers are already worried about lost equity in their homes. A move like this, which will reduce their value even further, will not help them in any way." This power grab, quite simply, not only will come on the backs of homeowners across the province, but there is also a high level of unpredictability in the Liberals' energy plan.

You will recall that the Liberals once promised to eliminate coal-fired plants by 2007. It is now 2009, and they have not met that target. They are now aiming for 2014. As Guy Holburn of the Richard Ivey School of Business at the University of Western Ontario says, "We have had a new minister pretty much every year. Each minister has his or her own preferences and issues new directives and abandons the previous plans. This creates a climate of uncertainty within the sector, which scares off developers."

The one certainty there is is that this is a power grab. It centres around one minister, the minister of everything, and in total, 20-some acts within 15-some ministries will be amended. Troublesome still is that this power grab will allow the minister more influence in how renewable energy projects move forward. One concern that I have in meeting with stakeholders, and this is why, I think, at the

end of the day—the question that our critic and our deputy leader asked very early on when this piece of legislation moved forward—it should actually go to the public. It is an omnibus bill. As I said, it is quite extensive in how many different acts it will open up and it is quite extensive in how many ministries it will impact. We must consider the fact that it will override existing title laws, contract laws, condominium bylaws and municipal bylaws. This is sweeping power for the Minister of Infrastructure and Energy, one of which I think the consequences have not yet been determined. I know that many people will approach this as an energy bill, and I encourage them to do so. I am focusing on it as the critic for consumer protection. In the consumer protection area, this is a failure, and I would urge the minister responsible for consumer protection and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure himself to figure out how we can best protect consumers with this piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thanks to my friend from Nepean–Carleton for her comments.

I'd like to go back to what the stakeholders are saying about this rush to nuclear reactors, the rush to nuclear energy, over and against—instead of—renewable and green energy. That's what we're doing here; let's be clear about it.

The Ontario Clean Air Alliance shows that for every dollar that the Ontario Power Authority spends on energy conservation and efficiency, it spends \$60 on new energy supply. Group after group, from David Suzuki to Pembina to World Wildlife to Greenpeace, have all spoken with one voice. They've all said that it is entirely possible to meet the energy needs of Ontario with the three Rs, that we don't need to go to the fourth R, nuclear "reactors." That's not where we need to go and that's not where we need to put our money. That's what they're saying.

The question here is, why isn't the government listening? Why do they bring forward this piece of greenwashing legislation that simply acts, as you've heard the member from Kenora–Rainy River say, as a kind of smokescreen for their real energy policy, which is all about nuclear reactors?

Certainly, according to the Ontario Clean Air Alliance, Ontario's wind-power potential is more than 10 times greater than our total electricity consumption alone. Ontario's biomass potential from agriculture and municipal waste is equal to 25% of our total electricity consumption. These are from the experts in the field. These are from those people who spend all of their time looking at energy issues and how we're going to meet our energy challenges in the future.

Why don't we listen to David Suzuki? Why don't we listen to Greenpeace? Why don't we listen to Pembina? Why do we not listen to the Ontario Clean Air Alliance? Why don't we listen to the experts in the field? Why does the McGuinty government continue with its ill-thought-

out, ill-strategized rush to nuclear, a nuclear that, I may point, out is riddled with problems of its own: cost overrides and, of course, the ever-present risk of radioactive waste, which, as we all know, lasts longer than we do—and longer, we hope, than the McGuinty government?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm happy to have an opportunity to offer some comments on behalf of small business people in my riding—I would think maybe the largest group of small business people, as my stakeholder group—and they would be farmers.

Actually, I've listened very carefully to what farmers have been telling me since the introduction of the act, and they're really quite excited and quite hopeful. Also, I have a release that was put out by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. I think all members of this House know that the OFA is a very reputable voice for farmers in the province of Ontario. This is what their release has indicated:

"Monday's announcement by Minister George Smitherman, energy and infrastructure, of the Green Energy Act, is viewed by Ontario farmers as an excellent opportunity to accelerate their entry into the energy production market, says Bette Jean Crews, president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

"When the act is fully operational, Crews says it will 'create new opportunities for our farmers to participate even more in Ontario's green energy revolution. Through their (increased) involvement in energy production, Ontario farmers will create new manufacturing opportunities and fuel other economic initiatives,' she says. 'OFA will work with the government to ensure necessary safeguards accompany green energy developments to preserve farmland and protect the interests of rural residents.'"

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So we have the representative of the farming organization. I have heard from farmers in my riding who are very eager to participate in this initiative. They want to be a part of the solution to enable this province to produce cleaner, greener renewable energy, and I'm very proud of that. They represent a very large sector of small business people in my riding. That's what they have been telling me.

I'm very grateful that they put this out in a release. The people of Ontario need to hear this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I've seen the wind turbines on Manitoulin Island, and I've seen, as many of us have—up Highway 10, I believe it is—that there are aspects taking place, and a lot are wondering: What's happening? The minister read correspondence from the Ontario farm council—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Ontario Federation of Agriculture, yes. I was thinking of the Ontario farm council.

I'm not going to hold it up as a prop, but I just received this today: "Wake-up Call to Ontario's Political Leaders, Attention Premier McGuinty." This letter goes on to read as follows:

"It is our belief that environmental concerns could be best addressed through a government policy that directs investment towards the improvement of conventional sources of power generation. In the case of coal generation, this means research and investment in new and improved clean coal technology. Current technology eliminates almost 98% of all emissions produced in coal generation." This letter goes on to say:

"A new direction in policy that makes power generation dependent on unreliable sources of power such as wind and solar generation will not, in our view, result in competitive electrical pricing. We feel that these sources of generation will add significant and unnecessary costs to the province's economy," which means that people in the long run are going to pay for it, and they don't necessarily want those aspects taking place. Of course, in the downturn of economy right now, anything that's adding costs is a disincentive to get things going.

"We ask again that your government reconsider its current policies, which include, most notably, the Green Energy Act."

That was just sent to us today by the Sarnia Construction Association and the Sarnia Building Trades Council. These are happening all throughout the entire province because people have concerns. As new legislation comes forward, there are always concerns, but we need to make sure they're heard from on all aspects, from all parts of the province. I would hope that the entire province will have a chance to comment through the committee process.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to have a chance to spend just a few minutes responding to the concern raised with respect to the ability to create jobs. I want to talk again about the detailed analysis that has come forward and the transformational nature of this piece of legislation.

This piece of legislation will set the foundation for a new way of generating electricity and a new way of transmitting electricity in the province, ultimately with the goal of creating new industries and a new manufacturing sector here in Ontario for the production of the types of things that we can put in our homes, in our businesses and out on our farmland to produce that new green energy. The jobs that will be created—we know that there will be a number of critical areas, and they're going to be good jobs for Ontarians.

I know that when I travel in my community in Etobicoke-Lakeshore, that's what my residents want to hear about. Approximately 40% will be jobs in transmission and distribution upgrades. The member opposite talked about the \$5-billion investment in the transmission and distribution systems as an example. We will see many direct jobs created in construction, equipment

supply, equipment manufacturing, design and transportation for the reconstruction and, frankly, revitalization of our transmission sector, so that we can get electricity from where it's generated to where it's needed. That's of critical import, and also, transforming that transmission grid to a smart grid, which I hope to talk a little bit about again later today, where the majority of direct jobs are specialty jobs, communications software systems, and these are exactly the types of investments that we are seeing made in the United States by President Barack Obama. We're going to make them here. They're going to be good jobs for Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Nepean–Carleton, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I want to thank my colleagues from Parkdale–High Park, Oshawa, the Minister of Agriculture and, of course, the former Minister of the Environment, the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

I appreciate the opportunity. I think that by prolonging this debate we're bringing much-needed attention to this piece of legislation. Again, I would reiterate my calls for extensive public hearings on this piece of legislation. I also firmly believe we must travel the province, because it will impact so many different pieces of legislation.

I do have a serious concern with the number the Liberals have used in terms of how many jobs they believe will be created. I do not believe it will be as high as 50,000. I also believe that many of those jobs will be public service jobs, and that is not what Ontario needs right now. Ontario needs private sector jobs, well-paying jobs, and we need to start getting those 71,000 jobs that we lost in the month of January back here in the province of Ontario.

I want to make a comment with respect to what I heard from the Minister of Agriculture but also from my colleague from Oshawa. He was pointing out some of the criticisms for this bill. I appreciate the minister bringing forward the OFA's endorsement of the legislation, but, sadly, that is just one voice. There are several other voices that she seems to be uninformed of, and they range from the Ontario Federation of Labour to the Ontario Taxpayers Federation. They come from the Ontario Real Estate Association; they come from the Canadian title registries.

There are serious concerns with this legislation that we must look at, not only in terms of the power grid and how we are producing energy in this province but also in how we can ensure that, for example, title law, contract law, agreements between individuals, municipal bylaws and condominium bylaws are all protected. We also must remember that this is going to impact the taxpayer severely. We must look at it also in that context.

We have some time. I urge the Liberals to work with us.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Further debate? The member for Oxford.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Well, he was the first one up.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Well, just one second. We will go in—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Did I miss you? Let's go in rotation. Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: There's a little bit of confusion there as to what the rotation is, I guess.

Certainly I'm very pleased to stand up and speak in support of Bill 150. In terms of my own experience in my riding, as my farmers have wholeheartedly endorsed this endeavour in terms of renewables, the fact that the legislation is proposing a framework for a single point of entry for approvals of processes for their projects is very important.

Over the last five, almost six, years I have worked with a number of my farmers who have been trying to get biodigesters online. A big frustration for them has been that they have had to go to a number of ministries to get approvals, and every time they thought they were a little bit closer to getting their project off the ground, there was another approval that they needed to get. This is going to make this much easier for them to do.

I certainly know that when I talk to my farmers about this, they're very enthusiastic about being part of this. We talk very often to farmers about diversification as farmers, and they see this as real diversification; they see this as another way of supplementing their farm incomes, by becoming farmers of energy, and that is very important to them.

I see a number of them, when I talk to them, who tell me they are very enthusiastic about biodigesters. I talked recently to a young farmer who was on the roof of his drive shed, working away at the roof itself that had lifted in a bit of a wind storm. He was up there, and he said it got so hot that he couldn't think of anything else but, "How can I harness this energy? How can I make this work for me?" That's exactly what most farmers are thinking as they watch the wind turbines in their communities. They're thinking, "How can I make this work for me?"

I have a dairy farmer, who's not very far from my farm, who has a smaller turbine, and he supplements his electrical use with that turbine. I have two other producers in the livestock industry who are using manure as a biodigester system, and again, they are going to create more energy for themselves and their neighbours. As a matter of fact, in Ilderton, there is the hope that Stanton Farms will be able to supply energy for their entire community over there. That is going to be a substantial impact on that community, in terms of reliability of energy, because it's from biodigesters, and biodigesters work all the time.

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Before becoming a member of provincial Parliament for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, I worked with and for the federation of agriculture as their member services representative. That was in the counties of Lambton and

Middlesex. One time the Lambton federation, at their monthly meeting, had a representative come in from one of the chemical industries in Sarnia to talk about the possibility of biodigesters. His concept was that farmers would work in a co-operative and site a biodigester on one farm. Everyone else would move their surplus nutrients, as we now call them, to that farm and they would share, in a co-operative, in the development of energy from that. That was a few years ago, and at the time the cost of doing so and the amount of organization sort of had people, and in particular, that group of farmers, saying, "That's a great idea. It sounds good. But financially we're not sure that we can do this."

They've changed their minds about that. In the last while, many of them have come to understand that we can't just continually try to find another way to put the manure back into the soil. Soil tests show that we've hit those points where we know exactly how much we can use of it, and they are often left with surplus. So now they have an opportunity to take that and turn it into energy.

The same concept goes in my riding in the community of Watford-Warwick, where we have a landfill. A lot of the Toronto garbage comes to that particular landfill. I have seen operations on the States side where the methane gas that's produced by those landfills is then used to drive generators and turbines to create energy for those communities. Again, it's a renewable source. The methane is going to continue for a number of years. It's very predictable and very reliable, and people know that the electricity will flow as it should. Those are all the kinds of things that we see in my community.

I also have a number of wind turbines. I have, as I say, turbines that are small, on individual farms. I also have seven turbines at Kettle Point. I know some people may say they don't like the appearance of them. Personally, I think they are quite elegant. I think they are amazing to watch. Maybe it's my heritage. Windmills are a part of the Dutch culture and I just happen to like windmills, right? Maybe that's part of it, but I really do find that they are beautiful and elegant. But they're not a new concept. As I say, I look in my heritage and we used the wind to help us to grind the wheat and the grains.

Farmers for years have had windmills. We've had windmills, and they predominantly were used to draw the pump and to draw water out of wells. Now, many farmers, actually, where electricity isn't readily available, will use solar pumps; that's a new innovation that we have. But the original use of the traditional farm windmill was to bring water up from the ground. That drove the pump and moved the water into the barns and into the house. It was something that was taken very much for granted. We expected that that was how we were going to get the energy to do those things. So it's not a new concept, as much as some people want to say that this is something different, that we don't know what we've got here and that we don't know how to handle this.

Quite honestly, I think that we are trying to make more of it than something that we know traditionally has

always worked. It's renewable. It's something that we don't have to try and dig out of the ground. I know people who talk about coal. Certainly, many people have heard of the concept of peak oil. The same applies to coal: We will run out at some point. It is not a renewable source.

We're talking in this act about renewable sources. We're talking about solar; we're talking about wind; we're talking about biodigesters. Those are things that will always be with us, we will always be able to rely upon them, and they do no damage to the environment. They are very much a part of what we've always had and always will have with us.

The one thing that I think is very important and that we need to also address here is the need to have part of this as a made-in-Ontario solution, which allows us to also have Ontario content in these. Yesterday at church, I was talking to a couple of farmers, and one of them has a large windmill on the farm where they actually subsidize the electricity for two farms and still generate into the system. They were talking about the fact that they were down for four months because they had a breakdown and the parts were an issue. They couldn't get the parts.

We need to bring this industry into Ontario as well. When we talk about job generation and economic stimulus, I think that's where we are. I think that when we start to look at who is going to build these, who is going to do the repairs and who is going to have the parts available, that's exactly what's going to happen. It needs to come to Ontario, so that as we build these and have them working, we can keep them working in a timely way.

The one individual told me he lost thousands and thousands of dollars in those four months while his turbine was down. He certainly appreciates the need to have it up and running, and he appreciates the need to have suppliers within the province so he can have it readily repaired when it does break down. It is machinery, and things do break down, so it's important for them to have that here. When we look at the green energy bill, we know that that is where we are moving as a province, and I think it's incredibly important for us to do exactly that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier):
Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 150, and I want to commend the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex for her remarks. Ontarians are certainly telling me, and I think they're telling all of us, that it's time to get on with this; it's time to make some moves in a positive direction.

If there is any way we could perhaps classify ourselves in the past, I think we've had a case of what marketers call unwholesome demand: It's something we want for our lifestyle but something that we know has some bad implications for our environment. If we continue to produce energy the way we thought it was okay to produce energy in the past, we're going to do further damage to the planet, and we don't want to do that.

I've heard a lot of people throwing around quotes that this person said this and the environmental movement

thinks this. Let me give you some real quotes that were introduced just recently. They're from people I think many of us should recommend. I want to start with Dr. Hermann Scheer. I think Hermann Scheer is renowned and accepted as a worldwide expert in the provision of alternate energy. He's general chairman of the World Council for Renewable Energy and also a member of the German Bundestag. He said, "Ontario's Green Energy Act represents North America's most ambitious and far-reaching enabling legislation and will place Ontario as a world leader in renewable energy development, industrial innovation and climate protection."

A little closer to home, Dr. Rick Smith, executive director of Environmental Defence, says, "The introduction of this legislation means Ontario will be a world leader in green development, and it couldn't come at a more opportune time as it directly addresses both our environmental and economic needs." With the economy in the state it's in, I think it's something we can use to actually improve that situation as well, something that is certainly agreed to by Joseph S. Mancinelli, international VP of the labourers' international union. There's lots of good support; it's time to move on with this. Let's have a vote as quickly as possible, and let's all support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: A lot of us had great hopes for Bill 150, and a lot of us are looking at it very carefully in the hope we can find something there that can move forward in a very productive and positive way. However, in my review of the bill so far, there has been far more symbolism than substance in this document. I think it's another one of the government's pushes to try to label something "green," and if you say it's green, then it must be green and we must move forward with it as quickly as possible. "As quickly as possible" quite often leaves out the comments by the very public this bill will affect. The public isn't going to be fooled by something that they don't understand. They aren't going to accept something just because someone says there are going to be 50,000 jobs created. Are those permanent jobs? Are those temporary jobs? What kind of jobs are they? Are they going to replace the permanent good jobs that have been lost since this government took power in 2003? I think that the public is waking up to the fact that, as I've said, there is more symbolism than substance to much of the legislation that this government has brought forward, especially that I've seen in the two years I've been here.

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It's unfortunate, because this is a huge opportunity missed to allow us to move forward to become leaders, which this bill does not allow us to do. The sorry part is, we're not even going to be able to figure most of it out until it has been passed and people begin experiencing the adverse effects of this bill in three years.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Certainly it's absolutely critical that we have movement toward a green economy. There

is no question about that. The question here is, does this bill do the job? And the answer is unequivocally, from the stakeholders, no.

Despite the member for Oakville's quotes, what was interesting was not so much what he quoted as what he didn't quote. As I said, when I have my 10 minutes, I'll go into that in more detail, but certainly you didn't hear the names Greenpeace, Pembina, David Suzuki. David Suzuki is a physicist by trade. Why is he so anti-nuclear? Why is he so anti this government's rush to put huge amounts of money—the greatest amount of money this province has ever spent—in one direction of energy production, and that's nuclear?

I listened also to the member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex with profound interest, because it is true that farmers are a group who don't really get their shrift in this place quite often. They don't get enough time. It's interesting to hear somebody stand up and defend them, but the reality is, this bill is not going to give them the money they need to move forward in a green direction. Farmers right now are hurting as much as any group in the province, possibly more. They don't have the money to go toward energy efficiency and green energy unless they get some help from this government. That's what we were all hoping to see in this Green Energy Act, Bill 150. That's what we didn't see in Bill 150, this Green Energy Act.

It is a case of greenwashing. I'm going to say the word over and over again because I like it. It's a case of greenwashing. That's what this bill is, and it's designed to hide the real expense, which is nuclear.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's my pleasure to add a couple of comments to this debate. Frankly, this is something that I think a lot of people have been waiting for in Ontario. I can speak about a proponent in my riding who has a couple of small water-generating capability projects. For years, he couldn't get to first base. As I discussed this piece of legislation with him, he welcomed the idea. He has also given me some input that I'm able to pass to the minister as we move forward with this piece of legislation.

I want to take a minute to comment on the comments from friends from the official opposition and the third party. They're talking about process, and they're talking about red tape. I haven't heard one solid suggestion from those folks about what we should do. We heard from the minister loud and clear in question period, a whole number of times, that he's willing to work with all sides of this House. We're going through a process.

We talk about consultation. I can look down the aisle from me, and I see a couple of members who were part of a government when consultation didn't exist. That particular government talked about the need to reduce red tape. That's all they talk about every day. What we're trying to do is streamline so we can get things done.

We talk about, as I said, consultation. On some omnibus bills that I was a recipient of when I was in the municipal sector, there was no consultation at all. We're prepared to consult. We're having extensive debate on this bill.

Like I said, I would like those members opposite to come with concrete suggestions, as the minister has been asking for. He has opened up the door. Tell us how we can best work together. Let's hear it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex has two minutes to reply.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I want to thank the members for Oakville, Burlington, Parkdale-High Park and Northumberland-Quinte West.

In terms of the comments made by the member from Burlington, saying there is no substance to the bill, I think he even looked at the bill she would know that in 65 pages this bill moves to act on well over 10 acts in terms of amendments, as well as talking about setting up a framework that will enable farmers and other proponents and people like the member for Northumberland-Quinte West was talking about, who are trying to get themselves on the grid and become local producers of energy. I certainly see this as an opportunity in terms of the localization of energy production. In Europe, we see that very often, where the grid does not go very far afield from the generator, so it's very easy for people to know where their power is coming from, and it's important to do that as well.

I'd like to also just take a quick moment to talk about the economic stimulus. This past weekend the Minister of Energy, George Smitherman, was in Chatham-Kent-Essex with the member Pat Hoy. At that time, the local Chatham paper reported the following, and this is a quote from the minister: "But, as we build more wind and other renewable energy projects in the province of Ontario, we're going to work hard to make sure that even more economic benefit lands in Ontario," to which the local economic development office, represented by Ron Anderson of Chatham-Kent, said, "That's the way it has to happen. It has to become law or (companies) search the world for these products." That's true. You have to give the impression and very clearly state that you're in support of renewable energy, and you do that through the law.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I look forward to speaking on Bill 150 in the time that I'm allocated. First of all, I would like to comment to the member from Northumberland-Quinte West that there have already been suggestions taking place in the House. Quite frankly, I'm going to make a number of suggestions in here when I speak, as I always do or try to.

I want to do a little bit of a disclosure. You see, I'm one of those individuals who uses 60 watts of solar, and for the past year or two years, I have been in negotiations with companies on developing a wind turbine that's specifically going to address the 22% cost of energy associated with the heating of water. I'm still in it. We have another meeting in two weeks to find out how successful we are on that.

To the member for Northumberland-Quinte West, I would ask what's happening with the Wesleyville site in

his particular riding. It has been sitting abandoned. It was designed for the production of energy, and we haven't seen anything happening in that area. I certainly hope that we'll find out.

The minister said that there were going to be 50,000 new jobs created. Basically, there is a strong concern about where those jobs are going to come from and what the infrastructure is going to be. I know that individuals who have graduated from UOIT in the alternative energy fields are looking abroad because there just doesn't appear to be anything. This particular individual wants to install wind turbines and work on generation and that aspect, but he had to go elsewhere in order to find some aspect.

There is a lot of concern within the constituencies regarding the audit process for the households and the cost, particularly individuals selling their houses and retired individuals in today's economy. It's an added burden that people have concerns with.

However, now I'm going to get to some of those points. I'm going to do a couple of plugs, as I always do. A previous government established a committee between two ministries, the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of Energy. The design of that committee was to establish the usage of current infrastructure in the province, being the dams in the province of Ontario. Most people don't realize that the MNR controls about 2,600 to 2,800 dams throughout the province, and each of those dams could be utilized for low-flow generation. It was the alternative fuels committee—that was an all-party committee brought in by that Mike Harris guy, and we did a lot of extensive research on this, and that's where I found out about low-flow generation.

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Low-flow generation can use the dams that are out there in producing energy, from one to five megawatts of energy. One of the key things with these dam sites is that a lot of them are at end of lines. What that means is, for those who don't understand, end-of-line sites are the transmission lines that run long distances to get the energy to certain communities. These communities would then use that energy. The difficulty is, the line loss to supplement or supply those communities is sometimes greater than the amount of energy that's shipped out. When you utilize these dams or potential dams at end-of-line sites, it has a huge impact on the grid, so you can virtually double—instead of producing one megawatt in one particular low-flow generation site, the amount of energy that would have to be transmitted to that community would then be this large supplement back onto the grid so it doesn't have to go there, which has a huge impact.

The other side of that coin—and I would hope the members from the third party know; they may or may not—is the impact of utilizing those dams. Most of the MNR dams are designed to control water flows. A previous minister with a previous government set a new directive that any upgrades, retrofits or reconstruction of any dam site were to take into consideration the develop-

ment of energy usage, to make sure that they could be used for low flow.

The point I want to make to the third party is that when you use a dam, it stops the water. For those who know the movie, for example, *A River Runs Through It*—Robert Redford starred in it—after his exposure to what happens in that industry, they realized that the dam stopping the water actually caused a lot of environmental problems in that when you stop the water, the sun comes down, warms up the dam and actually heats up the water. Warm water then rises up to the top of the surface and flows over the dam, and can increase the stream's temperature by as much as 10 degrees, which has huge impacts on bacteria growth and development. You actually turn cool or cold water streams into warm water streams, and that's not very good for the environment when we're talking about global warming and all those aspects. This is one of the key ways that it happens. Where do you think all that warm water goes when you heat it up and it's 10 degrees hotter, and it flows down into the stream or into the lakes, and those water bodies heat up?

One of the things that I've been able to do is work with bottom feed dams, which means that essentially, when you stop the water, there is a flow valve at the bottom of the dam. Not very many places use it or know how to use it. What they do is they open the bottom feed, and it allows the cool water from the bottom of the stream to continue on. It virtually maintains the constant stream temperature as it flows into those dam sites, which is much better for the environment.

The concern with this committee was that after there was a change in government, I happened to meet the committee Chair here in the hallowed halls of Queen's Park, and he said, "You know, the committee is not going anywhere; they shut it down." So I would hope that the government is looking at the potential development between those two ministries, and I would expect that the work within this bill would reflect some of those aspects of potential work between the two ministries in utilizing those underutilized sites.

Some of the other things: We talk in some of the research about the utilization of biomass from the forest sector. What that means is, normally, in a forestry operation, you go into the forest, take out the trees, strip off all the branches and leaves and leave that in the forest. Then you take the log out to make paper, as mentioned by the former leader of the third party, or wood chips or whatever goods you're producing, the paper and that, and you leave all those residuals in the forest.

What's currently being discussed is the removal of the biomass from the forest. When you're dealing with the Canadian Shield, it's not that much from the top of the surface to the hard rock that's down there, and what do you think fertilizes the forest? Most people don't realize that it's against the law to fertilize crown land in the province of Ontario. It's actually the residuals and all the bugs and everything else that takes place that feed the forest for future generations as fertilizers to ensure that it

continues on. We'll have a short period of time where we're going to utilize that biomass, but come 10 years from now, when they're looking and saying, "What's happening to our forest?" and "The growth rates are stunted," we'll be able to understand that there are some problems in there, and we need to make sure that we're making the right decision.

Part of the reason that I see that they're using this technology of the biomass and removing it from the forest is that in places like Hearst, for example, they used to burn all the residuals in a cogen plant where they used natural gas and forestry by-products, which would be the bark and everything that companies used to spend about \$10 a tonne to take to the garbage disposal sites. They were taking it up to Hearst, where they were getting paid for it so they could burn that. But when the mills aren't running, there are no residuals out there that they can utilize, so they have to find an alternative source that will be able to help to fuel some of those areas.

In the time remaining, I want to mention a couple of other things. They talk about other aspects that might be potentially utilized, and here's another point. For example, when you go to the mine in Timmins, the 9,600-foot level has a cooling station in there. For those who haven't—and the government members should take the time to tour the mine, because you'll get in there and it's an experience that's very interesting. It's probably a once-in-a-lifetime experience that you'll have.

When you get down to the 9,600-foot level, which is 9,600 feet below ground level, the temperature down there is a constant 40 degrees Celsius, because it's so close to the earth's core. What they have is, for 15 minutes out of every hour, the workers go into a cooling unit to keep them cool. Why don't we look at utilizing some of that core energy there, in old mine sites and deep mine sites throughout North America, for the heating of water and transmitting it to communities like Timmins, so it can be used? This would be a new technology, very much as utilized in Iceland, for example; that's how they've run their greenhouses in that environment for a long time, because they have all those fissures that come up, with the lava and that sort of aspect, and they use the heat from that to heat a lot of those areas. This could be another potential site that could be utilized. These are all sort of small things that we have.

In the time remaining, there was one aspect I wanted to mention. Can anybody in the House tell me what the definition of a protected area is, by the world standard?

Interjection: Yes.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Okay. Three things: no mining, no forestry and no hydro development. What's taking place here is, we're waiting to hear back from Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund and a number of organizations along those lines, actually to find out what their position is, because by allowing dams and hydro development to take place in the provincial parks, you will effectively remove those parks from the world standard of being classified as protected areas.

What's the impact going to be on those particular areas? I've already explained what happens when you

use a dam to develop electricity, and now you're heating up the water in protected areas. Those areas will essentially be removed as protected areas in the province of Ontario, and that's something that the province of Ontario is so proud of. People need to stand up for those things, and people don't understand that. They don't know that we can change it.

I appreciate the time. I look forward to comments and I will respond at the appropriate time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It was a pleasure to listen to the member from Oshawa, a very knowledgeable man. It was an interesting exposition.

But certainly, in partial response to what the member said, Greenpeace, Suzuki, Pembina, the World Wildlife Federation and the Ontario Clean Air Alliance have very detailed and, quite frankly—in response to a member from McGuinty's Liberals—very concrete suggestions and solutions to how to meet Ontario's energy needs. Predominant among them is not new dams; predominant among them is conservation and renewable energy. That's what all the environmentalists want to see, and that doesn't seem to be on the agenda, not even with this Bill 150.

When it comes down to it, most of those listening at home aren't physicists; they're not engineers; they don't know about mining and dams. But the simple question for this bill is: "Will this help me put new windows in my house? Will this bill help me buy a new, energy-efficient refrigerator? Will this bill give me better air for my children to breathe?" The very simple answer, for most people living at home who are not technically adept and who are not professionals in the field is: "No, it won't." There is nothing in this bill that will help the average consumer of energy meet their energy needs in a more green or renewable, sustainable way. There is nothing here.

The hope, of course, is that in regulations and all the stuff that comes out of committee work—which is why we'd like to see it go to committee—that will come forth, but it hasn't yet. What we've got is platitudes when we need action. What we've got is a kind of overarching theme of "Isn't it wonderful to be green?" without any concrete way of bringing that about, and that means money.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I always appreciate hearing from the member from Oshawa. I think he brings a good perspective often in his speeches and he comes from a time when he also served on this side of the Legislature in government. I'm interested, obviously, in his comments. I've heard them before around things like dams and the impact of the warming of water at the top of the dam that flows over and the impact that has on the ecology, on the environment, and the issues around water being drawn from bottom-feed dams. He always brings a

good perspective. I think they're the kinds of things that the government, that the minister, is looking for in the context of this debate: What are the issues that are out there? How can we capitalize on opportunities? The minister consistently says he's looking for constructive input, and I think the member has done exactly that.

I would ask him, though—I see he doesn't have much time in the two minutes, but there will be other opportunities, I hope. There are things locally, too, where he and I, in the area we represent, can add some value to the debate. I think there are things happening at UOIT with the geothermal initiatives that can be added into this discussion in a practical way, in a way that we can see, on the ground today, how we might be able to capitalize on those opportunities in the province of Ontario.

Energy from waste within Durham region: They're currently going through a process of developing an energy-from-waste facility using the most current technologies available. The member would have, I'm sure, a perspective on that—again, because it's local to where he lives and where he represents.

Finally, discussions around baseload: What about the maintenance of baseload through nuclear, and what about the rebuilds that could occur and that are in the process of approvals for both Pickering and Bruce, as well as the proposals for the new builds at Darlington and the capacity to ensure that we have the baseload on a go-forward basis to ensure that this province has the energy capacity it's going to need, in addition to our ability to bring renewables on and bring other forms of energy forward and do energy conservation?

I hope, given the opportunity, he'll have a chance to speak to those things that are more local to his experience, as well as having an implication for Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm proud to rise and to congratulate the member from Oshawa, my colleague, for the great presentation. The main reason is that, prior to his presentation, there were comments about coming forward with suggestions. The member said at the start of his presentation that that's what he was going to do. As I listened intently to the conversation, I was somewhat surprised that, in fact, his whole presentation was about things that could be done as related to green energy, none of which are presently in the bill. I would have thought that the minister, who had spent I presume hours, days, weeks and maybe months getting this bill ready—that some of that would have appeared in the legislation.

The member from Northumberland put forward his comment that the minister had said in the House that he was open to amendments, but if we go back over the record, the government doesn't have a very good record on acting on any of those amendments. It's one thing to say that you are willing to listen, but in the past, the examples are that they just listened but they didn't hear and did not make the changes that were suggested. So I would hope that with this presentation the minister would in fact do as he said: listen to the amendments and then

act upon those amendments, because in doing that, the bill would become a much better bill.

So far, the bill doesn't have a lot in it that actually accomplishes the title of the bill, which is to improve energy generation to improve our environment. Obviously, the bill is based on producing energy—wind and solar energy—but there is no way of dealing with that so we can use it at times when we need energy the most. I think the member talked about the baseload. I think that's one of the most important parts of this bill that needs to be addressed: When we generate that energy, can we in fact use it? Is it going to have an impact on the positive side of our environment?

So I thank the member for the presentation. It was very informative.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to comment on the comments made by the member from Oshawa. He raised the importance of various ministries working together—the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Ministry of Energy. That, exactly, is what the Green Energy Act proposes. It proposes to put in place an approvals process for renewable energy projects that will be more coordinated and where we will see those ministries work together. It will create a single, multimedia renewable energy approval at the Ministry of Environment to incorporate noise, air, waste water and waste certificates and permits to take water—all necessary approvals to move forward on a renewable energy project.

It seeks to set transparent requirements for setbacks and public consultation notice periods that need to be met as even a precondition to being considered for a renewable energy approval.

We will see better coordination between the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Natural Resources on approvals and permits and the provision of a service guarantee for proponents of renewable energy projects, again to meet the needs of having these coordinated approaches so that the ultimate gain is more renewable energy projects on board.

And to support this new process, the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure will establish a renewable energy facilitator to serve as a one-window point of access to government for renewable projects for interested parties and renewable energy proponents, should they wish to use that service.

So providing a little bit more detail with respect to the work that the Green Energy Act will move forward I think speaks directly to the comments made by the member from Oshawa, that it is critical that ministries work together, and that we will see that when the ministry moves forward with this bill. I thank you very much for your comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time that we have for questions and comments.

I'm pleased to return to the member for Oshawa, who has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I very much appreciate the comments by the members from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Oxford, Pickering–Scarborough East and Parkdale–High Park. We'll start with the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Part of it is, for example: can anybody tell me, is Algonquin Park a protected area? Anybody? No, it's not, and the reason it's not is because 1% of the forest at any one time in Algonquin Park is forested, so it has been removed. Now, what I'm getting to is, who is going to have the final say when you're dealing with MNR-related issues as pertains to the provincial parks, as compared to the energy authority?

What I see taking place here is that the Ministry of Energy will now have the authority when they don't have the hands-on work with the files dealing with provincial parks. I would expect that in those areas it will be political Ping-Pong where they can say, "Oh, no, it's the Minister of Energy who has responsibility, and they made the decision to put that dam in that particular provincial park." I have some concerns about the political Ping-Pong that may take place.

There are a number of other areas. For example, I think it's Wolfe Island where there's a huge concern taking place right now with the wind turbines there. There's two sides. The municipality is strongly in support of it, yet I believe I saw a TV show on it that was adamantly opposed to it, and they can't get anybody to talk to it, because it's a huge benefit to the community in a number of ways: one, the amount of funds that are coming in to generate the electricity, as well as the infrastructure for the jobs that are going on.

There are going to be a lot of things taking place in, yes, UOIT, to the member from Pickering–Scarborough East. The geothermal aspect and the development that they are doing is very important and will continue on. Hopefully some of the comments that I made regarding mining will go a long way in ensuring that we can develop that. Most people don't know that in New Zealand, geothermal has limitations on their ability to use that, because for the tourism sector it draws away too much, in the same fashion that Beck 1, 2 and 3 can only be fully utilized at certain times, given the same tourism factor.

I look forward to further debate, and I look forward to listening to other members' comments on it as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure and a privilege to rise and speak about the environment and what's being done, what's not being done, and what should be done.

I have to say that one of the most depressing ways of spending any time is to sit down and have a coffee with an environmentalist, which I have done on many occasions with many different ones. What you will hear from them is a litany of what governments don't do, actions governments don't take, responsibilities that

governments don't shoulder, with the end result, which is depressing indeed, that we have a planet headed towards catastrophe. That's simply what they'll tell you, and, depending on the environmentalist, they'll be optimistic enough to say that it's not too late, or some of them are even saying it's already too late.

That's the situation we are in. So this is a planetary problem, and we're looking at what we can do in our own little backyard—by planetary standards—of Ontario here. But the real response that we need here is that we must do something, and that we must do something dramatic. The time for small steps is over. The time for photo ops is over. The time for putting out bills that sound good but don't accomplish much has passed. We need to act, and we need to act dramatically.

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I know this is not the problem of our citizenry, because the people I speak to in my constituency and around this province all say the same things. They wish government would act too. They want to see a green economy. They want to see money being put into renewables. They want to see conservation as the first order of the day. Quite frankly, because of the education that is happening around the province and around the world, most citizens are doing everything they can. Most citizens are practising the 3Rs. Most citizens, were they able to financially accomplish it, would retrofit their houses and get energy-efficient appliances. They'd do it at the drop of a hat. I'd do it at the drop of a hat.

We had somebody come in to tell me how much new windows would cost on our old Victorian home. I can tell you it's a pretty tidy sum and we don't have it, so we're not going to be able to do it. The simple act of helping homeowners retrofit their homes would do a great deal toward helping the environment of our city. That is not in this act.

One member said that all we in the New Democratic Party do is attack; we don't offer concrete suggestions. Here is one: Why don't we do what Manitoba does and have a revolving fund that will pay people to retrofit their houses and make them energy efficient, and then pay back the government with the savings you have? It's been hugely successful in Manitoba. It's a good idea. It's not in Bill 150. It's not here.

It's one thing to bring forth legislation. But if you don't enforce the legislation, if you don't put money behind the legislation, it's just so many words, so much paper. I wish I could say differently about Bill 150, but unfortunately I can't. It's more paper, it's pretty words and it says "green" a lot. But it's not going to help me put new windows in my house. It's not going to help the tenants in Parkdale, who are paying their own utilities, by the way, and have no control over what those utility statements say. And it's not going to help their landlords, who have these massive buildings and can barely afford to keep them up and certainly cannot afford to do the major retrofits these buildings demand. That's downtown.

Green roofs? It would be nice to have caulking around the windows of some of these buildings. I would love to

show the Minister of Energy around Jameson Avenue and the shape some of the buildings are in, in terms of energy efficiency. It's not about green roofs for most people in Ontario; it's about simply making the tiny steps, the little steps, toward a more efficient, renewable world. This bill isn't going to help them do that. It really isn't.

Quite frankly, in terms of anything we look at, in terms of any area of expertise, shouldn't we first go to the experts in the field and ask them what they think we should do? This government has brought forward the name of David Suzuki over and over again in a number of contexts. Somehow, surprisingly, David Suzuki is not being mentioned in this one. Why not? Because we know what David Suzuki says about nuclear reactors and putting money into nuclear energy when you should be putting the same dollars—quite frankly, the economy isn't great. We're losing jobs, we don't have money and we're looking at a budget that's purported to come in with an \$18-billion deficit. Money is scarce, and the government is proposing to make the single biggest investment this province has ever made in anything into nuclear reactors.

All the environmentalists say, "No, this is not the way to go," partly because it's not really clean and green, and partly because the amount of money it takes to do that precludes spending money on renewables. That's a very simple concept. You don't need to be a physicist or an engineer to know there's a limited amount of money, and where you put it is really where your energy is—quite frankly, our energy in this place as well. We know what the government is doing: It's going full scale into nuclear reactors. That's the reality. They're going to be providing about 50% to 75% of energy in this province when we need to turn that ratio around and have that much in conservation and renewables. Every environmentalist says the same thing; it's not in this bill. It's not here. It's just not here.

In terms of our position vis-à-vis the rest of the world, we look around the world and we see other jurisdictions meeting a far greater portion of their energy requirements right now by conservation and renewables. But the problem with this discussion is that it always gets very heady, and it gets very professional and technical. That's why we need to make it simple; we just really need to make it simple. We are not spending enough money on conservation, we are not assisting our citizenry in being good conservationists, in being green and using renewables; we're just not. Do you think I wouldn't put solar panels on the roof of my house if I could afford it? I don't just speak for homeowners. I speak for all the small business owners around the province of Ontario. Do you think we wouldn't move forward if the government gave us some help, even in return for repayable loans? Of course we would. We'd love to. We'd love to retrofit our businesses and our houses; we'd love to do that. That would be a significant savings. It's not an expense, it's a savings down the road. We know this. It's like research and design, right? You put the money in up front and you

save the energy and the money down the road. Nuclear is expensive, the cost overruns are already historically documented—you're still paying for the last cost overruns on your hydro bills—and it's unreliable. We know that from history. We know that. We know that renewables are reliable. We don't have to look at history for that. We can look at present jurisdictional evidence around the world to see how wind works, how solar works, how it works together.

You know, we're not that different from Germany, Sweden, Norway or many other countries around the world where they take conservation and renewable energy seriously. I have a wonderful pamphlet in my office. I'm happy to send it to the Minister of Energy or anybody who asks. I used to campaign with it because it's so succinct and so good. It's put out by all of those people the government is not listening to: Pembina, David Suzuki, the Suzuki Foundation, Greenpeace, the World Wildlife Federation, the Ontario Clean Air Alliance. All of those groups came together and put out a brochure called Meeting Ontario's Electricity Needs. Now, these are scientists, these are physicists, these are engineers, these are people who spend their full days thinking about nothing but. They have the answers, they're right there in full colour. Why doesn't the government simply pick that brochure up and implement it? That's what the people of Ontario want. That's what my citizens want in my riding. That's what your citizens want in your riding. They don't want a full-scale rush to nuclear; they want renewable, they want conservation, that's what they want. I wish I could say otherwise, but they still want it even after the introduction of Bill 150, and they're still not going to get it. That's the reality. So I close again with that wonderful word, greenwashing, a new word in the dictionary, a new word in our vocabulary. We have a great example of it right here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I want to take a few minutes to talk about how the Green Energy Act speaks directly to the two things that the member from Parkdale-High Park has been talking about: increased conservation, increased renewables. I think as we try to boil this down in what is certainly a very detailed and complicated act—and I know from when I first read it that it's not a fantastic read in terms of telling a story and explaining what we are doing. But I can tell you that those who are extremely knowledgeable understand why some of the issues that might not seem familiar to us, feed-in tariffs or smart grids, are so important and speak directly to the issues that the member from Parkdale-High Park was talking about. If you don't have a critical price, if you don't know the price that you're going to get for your electricity, how can you make the determination to put that solar panel up on the roof of your farm or put that windmill up or put that biodigester on your farmland? That's critical.

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We need certainty. We need to be able to connect into the grid, and we need a smart grid so that we can

transform our system to one where you can have power flowing both ways on a grid, either from your solar panel into the grid or back into your home, if the sun isn't shining that day.

That's what this act is about. It's about modernizing the infrastructure we have so that we can move aggressively forward with more renewables. The fact that we are committed to doing that builds on the work we have already done.

I'll leave you with one quote as I conclude. This is Steve Howard, CEO of the Climate Group: "I wish to congratulate Premier McGuinty on his Green Energy Act. The Premier is walking the talk by putting the legislative tools in place to move Ontario, and indeed Canada, towards a low-carbon economy."

That is critical. That is what we're doing for the future of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to comment on the remarks from the member from Parkdale-High Park and her concerns over some of the things that are lacking in the bill.

On this side of the House, we go at it from a different aspect. We have concerns that the bill will do nothing but impose new costs on the energy system and consumers, that what it in fact is going to do is create a new bureaucracy with very little accountability to both the ratepayers and to the Legislature. We also don't believe that the government has really figured out how much this is going to cost consumers at the very end, and we believe that their initial estimates are way off. We also have called for committee hearings right away so that Ontarians can make their views known on this bill.

Despite everything that the government would lead you to believe, we feel that this bill is no panacea for the economic crisis in Ontario that we're experiencing right now. We also feel that, at the end of the day, Ontarians are going to end up paying a high price for the more expensive energy that these pet conservation projects are going to end up creating.

The job numbers that the government, through Minister Smitherman and others, is espousing are, we think, misleading. The jobs that will be created are probably for more inspectors to intrude themselves into people's lives and monitor their energy efficiency.

The competitive business in energy generation is over. This bill gives sweeping powers to the minister to direct power acquisition and transmission/distribution expansion in Ontario. Plus, there is no guarantee that this plan will attract sufficient new and replacement generation to meet our energy demands.

I look forward to the rest of the debate and an opportunity to make some more comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I think that it's important that when we consider—I know the honourable member talked about what her constituents are saying, and I've

been hearing a great deal from my constituents, in a rural riding. They really are quite excited and quite supportive of the proposed legislation. They too, I know, look forward to the opportunity that all Ontarians will have to provide input to this piece of legislation.

Any and every bill that has been introduced in this Legislature has gone out for public hearing. That has not always been the case with previous governments in this Legislature, but we are committed to ensuring that the people of Ontario, before bills become law, do have an opportunity to have their say.

One of my constituents, Don from Milford, writes: "Hello, Premier McGuinty, Minister Smitherman, MPP Dombrowsky," and he even talks to conservation officer Peter Love. There's a recognition that our effort to promote conservation—the conservation officer here has been identified. Don wrote: "I commend you ... for your strong stand on moving forward with your Green Energy Act, which will streamline the process for bringing clean," green, "renewable energy onto our grid and help create a green revolution with green-collar jobs"—green-collar jobs; from my constituent, this is his perception.

"We believe you must continue to do more to support and encourage small- and large-scale renewable energy in all ways possible.... Energy efficiency is the lowest-cost, cleanest and quickest option to keep our lights on and to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions that are contributing to" climate change. "Energy efficiency investments reduce our energy bills, create jobs now and make our industries more competitive." This is from Don. He recognizes the benefits of this bill, and I'm very happy I had the opportunity to share that this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want again to commend the member from Parkdale–High Park for her comments about the bill and what the bill doesn't do. I was most appreciative of the comments about the fact that the bill doesn't solve the problem, at the very least, with a \$300 tax on someone selling a home that identifies a problem. If that included, from what I got from the comments, some type of program that would help people put new windows in and put more insulation in their homes, then we would see some conservation. But the only thing we're going to conserve with the present approach is the bank account of the province or whoever is getting the \$300 for the audit, because nothing happens after the audit. It says, "You are deficient in insulation; you'd better reduce the price of your home and lose a little bit on it," but there is no direction to solve the problem. I think that's a glaring hole in the bill.

The other thing is in response to the Minister of Agriculture and Food and her comments about the rural community being very supportive of the direction this bill is taking. They're only interested or only supportive of the direction, not of the content of the bill. When it comes to what it will do, they say, "Well, yes, we like the opportunities to generate electricity from biomass and we can get approvals for that." They didn't notice in the bill that if Hydro One doesn't have the infrastructure to put

that into the grid, then they won't get a licence to do it. And there is no process in place on how you would go about getting that grid put into your community or your area, because local planning has been completely taken out by this bill. So there will be no more input from the same groups in rural Ontario as to how we facilitate the future transportation of the energy we generate, so we won't be generating. I think there are some shortcomings in this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'll return to the member for Parkdale–High Park, who has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This bill has lots of aims and very little in the way of means; that's what we've got here.

I was very appreciative to hear the member from Sarnia–Lambton and the member from Oxford raise some issues, and they're absolutely right. This will create a new bureaucracy that will not have the desired effect, because it quite frankly doesn't answer the desired requirements of the people who live in the province of Ontario. It's a very simple question: What do we want when it comes to helping with the environmental issues of our day? We want some help in bad economic times to do the right thing. We want some help to do it. We need to put in new windows. We need to retrofit our homes, our apartment buildings and our businesses. We need to put solar panels in. We would love to see wind turbines generating energy. We'd love to do this. We'd love to start a company that would manufacture them in Ontario. But there's no money to do any of that. There's no money, and quite frankly there's no political will. If there were political will in this place, there would be money.

Where there is political will is to put over \$30 billion and up to \$50 billion into nuclear reactors, and that's not what I'm hearing from the people of Ontario. That's not what I'm hearing they want. That's not what we're hearing from the experts. That's not what we're hearing from David Suzuki. That's what we're getting. That's the substance of what we're getting from the government; not the spin, but the substance. Even though this calls itself "green," it doesn't mean it is. It's just that simple.

Will we in the NDP vote for it? Probably yes, because it's an inch where we need a million miles, like most Dalton McGuinty Liberal legislation—an inch where we need miles. But it leaves so much to be desired.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Charles Sousa: I am pleased to speak to the Green Energy Act. The proposed bill is indeed, in my opinion, a bold series of coordinated actions which would enhance economic activity and reduce our impact on the climate by making it easier to bring renewable energy projects to life and by fostering a culture of conservation by assisting users in making the transition to lower and more efficient energy use.

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Furthermore, if passed, the Green Energy Act would create needed jobs in domestic manufacturing and assembly, construction trades and the service trades, such as

financing and engineering. If passed, Bill 150 would make Ontario the North American green energy leader, further building on the elimination of coal fire.

The decisions we make today will have tremendous positive impact on our long term, on our tomorrow. As announced, the proposed Green Energy Act will enhance economic activity and reduce our impact on the climate with two equally important thrusts: by implementing and making it easier for renewable energy projects firstly and by fostering a culture of conservation.

If passed, the Green Energy Act, along with significant amendments to 15 other statutes, will set Ontario on a course for a greener environment, and more importantly, a greener economic future.

Here are some of the key measures proposed to help expand renewable energy, which include establishing a streamlined approval process and providing service guarantees for renewable energy projects; establishing, for the first time, province-wide standards for renewable energy projects like standardizing setback requirements for wind farms; implementing a smart power grid in Ontario, making it easier to connect renewable energy generation in our system; as well as offering incentives for small-scale renewables, such as zero or low-interest rate loans to assist homeowners in financing the capital costs of residential renewables.

If passed, the Green Energy Act would also implement conservation initiatives, making energy efficiency a key purpose of Ontario's building code: by greening Ontario government and the broader public sector buildings and facilities to LEED standard; by requiring the development of energy conservation plans throughout our public sector; by making more energy-efficient products available to more consumers; and by establishing mandatory conservation targets by requiring those targeted conservation measures to protect low-income Ontarians.

What gets measured, gets managed. Some of the key economic measures are creating a feed-in tariff regime by enabling domestic content rules for renewable energy projects and by providing opportunities for local communities, First Nations and Metis communities to build, own and operate their own renewable projects.

As mentioned, one of the key initiatives, if passed, would be the creation of an estimated 50,000 jobs we've spoken about. These investments would trigger not just direct jobs but indirect jobs with following initiatives of conservation, renewable energy in the smart grid and transmission and distribution upgrades, and more importantly, trying to ensure domestic content throughout. But don't take it from me. Here's what some of the experts and leaders in their field have to say.

"Ontario's Green Energy Act and supporting initiatives are the most comprehensive renewable energy policy entered anywhere around the world," as said by Michael Eckhart, president of the American Council on Renewable Energy in United States.

This one says, "This legislation, which is unprecedented in North America, will provide tangible, immediate stimulus to the construction industry and create thousands of good 'green' jobs. And it will help all of us

build a sustainable future for our children and grandchildren," as said by Ucal Powell, president of the Carpenters' District Council of Ontario.

"We applaud this forward thinking to stimulate the green economy, as well as the overall leadership shown in stimulating Ontario's and Canada's economy," said by Joseph Mancinelli of the Labourers' International Union of North America.

"Democracy is at work in Ontario! Homeowners, farmers, First Nations, co-operatives, municipalities and institutions have spoken. They want to be conservers and generators of clean, green, sustainable energy." That's Kristopher Stevens, executive director of Ontario Sustainable Energy Association.

This issue speaks directly to my resident groups in Mississauga. I grew up in Mississauga at a time when the Lakeview power plant was at its full capacity. Walking down the streets of Ogden Avenue going to school, the four sisters were spewing some of the worst pollution in this province.

Even with increased renewables and enhancements in transmission, we know that there's more need for reliable power. As such, we celebrated, at the same time, the demolition of that power plant. Now there's a need for more power, and they have put forward an RFP to have a power plant in Oakville, Mississauga or Etobicoke.

The fact is, tearing down the coal plants is the right thing to do. The fact is, making conservation the priority of our plan is the right thing to do. The fact that we've torn down that lakefront power plant allows us now to make great strides in redeveloping and revitalizing our waterfront.

Times have changed. Fifty years ago that power plant was the right choice. It was an enabler, and Mississauga South has done its fair share in supporting the province over these past many years. I'm proud of our commitment to this government. I'm proud that this government has taken the initiative and the lead on a number of green projects. Some of those concrete issues include the greenbelt and the protection of our northern boreal forest, and now we are looking forward to revitalizing the waterfront here in Mississauga.

I'm proud of our government's initiatives, but I'm also recognizing, as we all do, that we have a duty to our residents and to our constituents first. My family has been living in an area in Mississauga South for the past 20 years, where it has been proposed to possibly have a power plant. We recognize and appreciate the active involvement of our community and their concerns. We will continue to take those into consideration as we move forward. That's why the green act is such an important piece of legislation: to enable us to have before us more discussions around renewables and conservation.

I welcome the Green Energy Act. It is a bold proposal which will position Ontario to be cleaner and more competitive. We have a duty to our future generations to provide more energy efficiency and reliable, sustainable power. In the end, we have a duty to our future generations to be a more prosperous society.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to make some comments on the member from Mississauga South. He talked about the coal plant in his riding. I also have a coal-fired generating plant in my riding, and we want to see it remain open, whether we put additional scrubbers on it—we've got two of the cleanest units in North America and we'd like to see scrubbers installed on the other two units. I've got messages from my riding where they talk about solar energy being 42 cents a kilowatt hour, wind energy is approximately 10 to 15 cents per kilowatt hour and electricity from our coal-fired plants costs less than 4 cents a kilowatt hour. This works 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Wind and solar energy can only produce electricity, at the most, 25% of the time. The year has 365 days in it and 24 hours in each day.

The members of my constituency association, as well as members of the construction association in Sarnia and the building trades, asked the energy minister and the government to look at installing scrubbers in these other two units to maintain that generating station and keep it going. There are a number of people who are employed in that plant who have good jobs, with probably \$300 million a year going to the local economy.

I would support the Green Energy Act as long as it looks at all aspects of energy, and coal-fired generation should be one of those.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure, again, to rise and speak about the environment and offer some comments after the member from Mississauga South.

Certainly, I rang with the member over here from Sarnia-Lambton about coal-fired plants. Here's a classic case. They're still open despite Bill 150. Of course, they were originally supposed to be closed in 2007; now it's 2014. Quite frankly, all bets are off whether they'll even make that deadline—Nanticoke, one of the single biggest polluters in Canada.

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When your child comes home from school with asthma, there is an environmental component. There is a health cost to keeping coal-firing plants open, and the health cost is borne by our elderly, our weak and our children. That's what's happening here. We need to close them; we need to close them as fast as possible. But Bill 150 doesn't do that, either; it doesn't do that, either.

This is where actual Ontarians live—a child with a puffer, not enough money to retrofit their houses, looking at a future that goes nuclear but doesn't mean much to them in their wallet or in their own environment. That's where people live, and this bill doesn't address it.

Coal-firing plants are a classic case where Dalton McGuinty's Liberals have just failed the environment—no question about it, just failed the environment. You won't find an environmentalist who thinks coal-firing plants are a good thing; you won't. They all, to a person, think that they need to be closed as soon as possible for

the health of our children and our seniors, among others—among all of us. We all have to breathe, after all.

That's a clear omission here, a very clear one; the other, of course, as I came back to again and again, is that there's no money to make it happen. There's no money to make any of this happen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I heard the last speaker say there's no money for conservation and for retrofits, and I want to read something about that.

First of all, one megawatt in four, as we go ahead for the next 20 years, 6,300 megawatts, is our aggressive conservation target for energy. Energy conservation is the number one way of producing it. The minister, not satisfied that we were aggressive enough, sent a directive in September 2008 to OPA to say that we want to have more conservation, more renewables and more discussions with First Nations.

But I would like to get around this \$150 audit fee. What the \$150 audit fee gives you is a bunch of eligible improvement retrofits. Canada has promoted this and Ontario has promoted it. The heating systems: You'll go from \$600 in an energy-efficient furnace up to—wow—\$7,000 for a groundwater source heat pump; the ventilation system; cooling system; domestic hot water system; you'll get \$1,200 for attic insulation; exterior wall insulation up to \$1,800; basement insulation up to \$1,000; basement header insulation, where a lot of the air losses are, \$200; exposed floor insulation, \$300; crawl space insulation, \$800. There are several more here. So the dollars are there. You pay \$150 to be able to take advantage of all those good grants from Canada and from Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I think the member from Mississauga South has been given a pretty important script to read, but he should think of the consumer at the end of the day.

What I hear embedded in this legislation, Bill 150, is that they want you to conserve—and we would support that—but what they're actually saying in code language is, "You're going to use less," which is good, "but you're going to pay more."

All of these renewables and other generation sources are important, but in many respects, even the Ontario Power Authority, the OPA, in their report, recognized that there was a very finite amount of generation capacity that would be of value to the grid in Ontario. We should focus more on conservation, and I think that's clear.

When I really get into the substance of the bill, I'm troubled even further because it's an admission, first of all, that Bill 100, the earlier attempt on energy, was a failure. In fact, the smart meter that they're installing in your home is a failure. It's actually a time-of-use meter so that they can charge you more at different times of the day, as much as 100% more if you dry your clothes at the wrong time of day.

Not only that; it's important to recognize too that they promised back in the 2003 election to eliminate the coal plants at Nanticoke in 2007.

Interjection: And Lambton.

Mr. John O'Toole: And Lambton. Actually, they said 2007, then they said 2011; now they are not going to do it until 2012. In my riding, there's a nuclear plant, the Darlington nuclear plant. That plant is 5,000 megawatts; it's the same as the plant in Nanticoke.

So they haven't really got a solid plan here. I'm very concerned that this bill is just one more kind of deflection from the real issue, that we have an energy shortage. The price is going up—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Member for Mississauga South, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I'd like to thank the members who spoke on this bill, from Sarnia-Lambton, Parkdale-High Park, Ottawa-Orléans, and Durham. I'd like to begin by saying to the member from Durham that I do, in fact, write my work.

We are indeed going to use less; we encourage everyone to use less. We are encouraging more conservation so that we can protect our environment and stimulate our green economy. I encourage all members to do the same when it comes to talking to their constituents and residents, sharing with them some of the programs that are available to us for retrofits and other things that of nature.

The bottom line: The discussions we are having today are about the long term. We are indeed doing a number of things concurrently, like long-run transmission. We are closing coal and we are going to do what we need to in order to expand renewables.

There is also a need for supplementary peaker plants in order to accommodate some of these green renewals as they come on-stream, and we're doing that in tandem with this strategy.

I take great pride in the work that we all do here in this House for the benefit of future generations. Some of the decisions that we're making today are not simply about the cost they have to us today but consider the long-term effects and the cost that they take in the future. I encourage everyone to support the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Bill 150, the Green Energy Act: Is it truly about green energy or is it about a conscious Liberal decision to hide things in regulation and to defer and deflect what is happening in Ontario?

I know that I'm not alone to say that I've received many e-mails, phone calls and letters from residents in my riding of Dufferin-Caledon and across Ontario regarding Bill 150, the Green Energy Act. I have to say that most of the correspondence I have been receiving is asking me to speak out and question the government about the impact Bill 150 will have on communities, businesses and consumers. Much of the concern is because the specifics are not in Bill 150. They're being left to regulation, and as we all know, regulations are not open to public de-

bate or input. Cabinet will make them in secrecy, without any input from the public.

I want to highlight a few of the regulations that would be enacted with 150.

Under the Green Energy Act, permits: a regulation requiring people to provide information about energy consumption and efficiency of a property when trying to sell or lease that property. That, of course, is your mandatory \$300 home audit.

Another regulation authorizes public agencies and consumers to establish energy conservation and demand-management plans, and can require public agencies to consider conservation and efficiency when buying goods and services or making capital investments—again, under regulation.

Under schedule B, Electricity Act, it gives power to make regulations governing the smart grid and its implementation.

Under schedule D, the Ontario Energy Board Act, it expands the regulation-making authority.

We go then to schedule G, the Environmental Protection Act, which adds regulation-making power, including regulations governing location of renewable energy facilities and eligibility requirements for approvals. I will come back to that one. Schedule L, Ministry of Natural Resources, gives the minister power to allow generation facilities in provincial parks and conservation reserves, and that, of course, was formerly only under the power of the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

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One of the main concerns myself and many of my constituents have is the setbacks of wind turbines from homes. The issues of setbacks are not addressed in the legislation itself, and important decisions such as this one will be made without public consultation. This is very troubling for the constituents of Dufferin-Caledon. Many of my constituents have written to me with concerns about how wind turbines will affect the health of people in the community if proper and appropriate setbacks are not set out in legislation. Some people already are complaining of crippling headaches, nosebleeds and constant ringing in the ears, and these are people who support renewable energy and were supportive of wind turbines in their area. However, they were not told how this would affect their health.

This is not just coming from one person. In fact, a team of physicians have been examining such health hazards in New England and the Maritimes and are working on a research paper looking at the adverse effects of wind turbine noise on human health.

A company in Germany with the mission statement to "enhance the international promotion of environmental technology within the fields of recycling of ash and waste energy sources, renewable energy, environmental industrial development" says this about the location of wind farms: "The location under consideration should first be wind-intensive during the whole year. Buildings, particularly housing, should not be nearer than two kilometres to the wind farm." Please keep in mind that the minister at

this point has speculated that the setbacks would be 500 metres. Riverside county in California has stated, "Restrict the placement of wind turbines within two miles of residential development unless the applicant supplies documentation that the machine(s) will not produce low-frequency impulsive noise."

There needs to be comprehensive planning and consultation for industrial wind-driven turbine electricity production in proximity to homes, pending full clinical evaluation and conclusions of health hazards. The New England and Maritimes research team have gathered a number of references, all current, from acoustical studies of wind turbines, studies from medical journals and journals of environmental health, documenting negative impacts of noise that are characteristics of noise emissions from wind turbines, and even a few small studies around wind farms in Europe. They also have some basic clinical research studies documenting the effects of wind turbine noise in children and adults. These studies show an increased incidence of heart disease and other cardiovascular complications, and potentially even more far-reaching implications in children.

Doctors who are participating in this study have reported that there is a public perception that wind power is green and has no detrimental impact on the environment. However, these turbines make low-frequency noises that can be as damaging as high-frequency noises. Dr. Bridget Osborne of the Royal College of General Practitioners has published a paper detailing a marked increase in depression among local people who are within close proximity to wind farms.

We cannot put a cost on the health risks associated with the harmful effects of wind turbines located within a close proximity to homes, schools and hospitals. I want to highlight an e-mail I received from a concerned resident of Ontario: "We experience sleep disturbances and deprivation, the sensation of skin crawling or being bit, ringing in the ears, headaches, heart palpitations, digestive problems and nosebleeds." None of these symptoms were present before wind turbines became a part of their lives.

Another e-mail I'd like to share with you is from a constituent of Dufferin-Caledon: "As an Ontarian deeply concerned about our environment and active in trying to conserve, recycle and compost, but concerned also about health, I would ask that you carefully consider the effects of vibration and noise made by wind turbines."

Mr. Speaker, do not get me wrong. I support energy renewal and conservation. Personal commitment to improving the environment by opting for greener alternatives is important. My family and many others have opted to change their consumer habits to incorporate conservation, or purchase low-emission or hybrid vehicles, or even to purchase renewable power for our homes and businesses. However, placing the word "green" in the title of a bill does not necessarily make it so. The residents of Ontario deserve to have their say. This is why I ask, what's the rush? Why are we departing from the normal parliamentary tradition of introducing a bill, then

allowing the opposition to consult with interested stakeholders and the public?

We started debate on Bill 150 24 hours after it was introduced. One of the many e-mails I have received said, "The removal of the individual rights through the centralized and fast-tracking of the approval process is alarming and undemocratic." It is unusual that an important piece of legislation such as this, with no less than seven pages of explanatory notes and 65 pages of clauses, opening up and amending over 15 pieces of legislation, including the Niagara Escarpment act, which would greatly affect my constituency in Dufferin-Caledon, was called for second reading debate within 24 hours of being introduced for first reading.

Another problem I and many of my constituents have is that the proposed Green Energy Act removes all planning approvals for renewable energy proposals from municipalities. My constituency of Dufferin-Caledon has been a leader in hosting wind turbines in our province. In Dufferin county, Melancthon township has over 80 wind turbines operating and generating renewable power for Ontario. The township worked with the landowners and developers to site the turbines. Melancthon was also able to negotiate with the developers to ensure that the entire township benefited from the power generation project. Under Bill 150, Melancthon would not have been able to make those arrangements. All of the time and money municipalities have invested in updating their official plans will be wasted because, if Bill 150 is passed without amendment, municipal approval would be unnecessary.

The minister has estimated that this bill will cost approximately \$5 billion to upgrade the grid and transmission lines to accept new power generation. The unknown is how much more individual consumers and businesses will be paying in higher electricity rates. We need to slow down and determine the real costs for electricity consumers and the real impact on our economy. That is why I am calling for immediate and fulsome debate on Bill 150, and I hope this is not simply another rubber stamp for the Liberal government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Certainly it's always interesting to listen to the member from Dufferin-Caledon. She cares about her community. But I'd like to spend my time addressing the problems that were brought forward by the Ottawa-Orléans member who, for the first time in this debate, attempted to answer some of my questions about the practical issues that most Ontarians deal with: How do I put new windows in? How do I retrofit my house? Does this bill help me do that? And the answer is no—also, of course, businesses, apartment dwellings and everything else that sucks energy up and can't, but would like to, be green.

He recommended all of these government programs. Please. Anybody watching this program, just about everybody who owns a home has gone through this, and I would love to see how much money you get back from any level of government, particularly this one, when you

try to put new windows in, buy a new refrigerator, put in an energy-efficient stove, do something about that old furnace in the basement or put solar panels on your roof.

My husband and I go through Bullfrog Power only because we want to be clean and green, and it's the only option out there right now for us. It adds a third more to our energy bills. We pay it because we want to be green. There is no substantive help for somebody who wants to be green right now. It costs a lot of money, and it usually takes nine to 12 years to recoup the investment, when you could do what Manitoba does and simply loan the money to people who do the work now and pay you back over time. That would be green, but, of course, it would not be greenwashing.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to take a couple of minutes to talk specifically, if I can, about the issue of setbacks and to speak to the concerns raised by my colleague opposite with respect to what the government's steps in the Green Energy Act to tackle and find a way to deal with the patchwork of setbacks across communities would do to her community.

I can tell her that in the past, many municipalities have really struggled with the difficulty of balancing the proposal from proponents coming forward and the desires of their residents and their community. Municipalities did not have the ability to have the expertise with respect to the establishment of setbacks.

If this proposed legislation passes, the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Natural Resources will work with the Ministry of Environment in the development of province-wide standards for renewable projects adjacent to homes and sensitive areas, to eliminate that patchwork of municipal bylaws that made the local processes very difficult and encumbered.

A universal standard would be designed to consider the effects on human health and the safety of the environment. All of that would be established during a consultation process, to make sure that we had an opportunity to bring forward the most recent scientific evidence and advice and to establish what would be the appropriate setback in various circumstances.

I can tell the member, having had the opportunity to sit across the table from many a municipal councillor, that this was very much a request that many municipalities sought advice and assistance on from the province.

So, as we'd done with respect to smoking bylaws, now the province is going to come forward and help establish an appropriate setback to help push forward increased renewable power generation and make sure it's done in a way that protects the health and safety of Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to first comment on the dissertation by the member from Dufferin-Caledon, in which she spoke about the health issues related to wind turbines, which have been well documented. I've

watched a number of programs myself and read some articles about it. At first, I thought it was maybe a bit of an urban legend. But as more and more of these have been raised and exposed to different comment on TV and in the media, and different reports by different scientists and different people who have talked about these issues—there obviously is something to it. I commend the member for representing her riding in this manner and bringing these issues up.

One of the comments I wanted to make was that I heard the member opposite say that municipalities had asked for opportunities like this from the government for advice and to help them manoeuvre through these things. But I don't think they wanted them to overrule them and tell them how to run their business, which I think this bill will do at the end of the day.

Also, the minister said he estimated that this is going to cost \$5 billion, and he said that would be a 1% increase to the ratepayers when the bills are all in. Some people did some calculations, and they say that \$5 billion divided by 4.5 million consumers is about \$1,200 per consumer, and this would be more like, over three years, a 30% increase.

I commend the member from Dufferin-Caledon. I agree that we need to have committee hearings and we need to have input and look at amendments and whatever way we can improve this bill. It's going to be with us for a long time if it's implemented as it's written, and we need to make sure it's the best bill at the end of the day.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I know that we've covered the aspect of how the standard setbacks from homes are going to be set for these turbines, and this was one of the major concerns that this member had. So I'd just like to go into other areas of conservation, which is just as powerful as renewables in making sure we get away from dirty coal and going on to provide a good system of energy in this province.

Under these targets we've set, 1,300 megawatts is the residential target for conservation. Of that, 650 is the part that's conservation. There's 650 from energy efficiency; but 650 is related to making our homes more energy-efficient. That 650 megawatts is something we have to achieve over 20 years. A great part of that is in section 9; homes up to three storeys are covered under section 9. If we're going to get those energy savings, then we have to do this over the next 20 years. That's the plan.

Presently we do 30,000 a year. The 30,000 a year is fine, but it takes 90 years to reach the 2.7 million homes in the province.

All these energy retrofits save the people money. You can get money back very rapidly for air sealing. It probably takes three years for you to get your money back, and then you get all that future stuff. So we have to look at what we're doing with conservation: 6,300 megawatts and maybe more once we get the new report back from OPA, and a good part of that's residential. I just ask the members to think of the residential retrofits. They're very important.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member from Dufferin—Caledon, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I can't let the comments go from the member from Etobicoke—Lakeshore about the fact that municipalities needed their help to decide on setbacks.

Amaranth, Melancthon, Mulmur, Mono, East Garafraxa in my community of Dufferin—Caledon would love to have the money back that they've spent already on amending their official plan and doing all the planning to prepare for these wind turbines to come into their communities. They've done the planning, they've already done the work, and now what you're saying is, "Throw that out. Throw out the \$50,000 that you spent on that official plan amendment, and we'll look after you now, you dear little municipality." Very dismissive. I believe that taxpayers need to know the true cost of the Green Energy Act. I also believe in local planning. Municipalities in Dufferin—Caledon should oversee and approve renewable energy projects in their communities.

The majority of people I've been hearing from are in support of renewable energy and creating an Ontario that will be better for generations to come. All they want is for their voice to be heard. Many people in Dufferin—Caledon are in support of industrial wind turbines in our communities. However, they want them to be placed a safe distance from homes. I stand up and speak today on their behalf. Let's get the input from communities that have wind turbines, wind farms and energy experts. I hope we can work together to create legislation that meets the needs of communities across our province. Our communities are unique, and residents deserve to have their voices heard in this debate and not be sloughed aside by saying, "We'll look after you because we're the big, friendly Liberals."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased today to be able to speak on behalf of my community, which has very warmly welcomed this bill, and speak in support of Bill 150, the Green Energy Act. The bill that has been proposed would enhance economic activity in Ontario at a time when we need just that, and help us move on to a newer, greener economy, but at the same time, it would have a positive impact on our climate.

There are two thrusts in this bill. The first is to bring renewable energy projects on stream much more quickly than we are currently able to do. The second is indeed to foster a culture of conservation. We want to assist homeowners, governments, schools and industrial employers to transition to lower and more efficient energy use.

I'd like to talk a bit about some of the initiatives that are in this bill. It's actually quite a lengthy bill—65 pages—a very technical bill, and I think it warrants looking at some of the things that are in it.

First off is what's known as a feed-in tariff, which is a standard price to promote the development of community-based and large commercial renewable energy projects. What it means is that proponents would be

guaranteed a market-viable price for energy generated from renewable sources; for example, solar, wind—either onshore or offshore—water, biogas, biomass and landfill gas. This is really important in Guelph.

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Guelph actually has one of the first landfill gas generation projects—possibly the first. When we put out the first round of RFP for renewable energy projects, the city of Guelph, in partnership with Guelph Hydro, was one of the first winners. There's an old dump in Guelph called the Eastview landfill—it was closed a few years back—and we are currently collecting the methane from that dump. It's going into a small generator, and that energy is being sold into the Ontario Hydro grid. This is the sort of project which would be helped along by a guaranteed feed-in tariff.

Another RFP that a Guelph proponent won is the corporation that collectively acts on behalf of farmers buying energy, Ag Energy Co-Op. They won an RFP to put solar panels all over their building and to feed that into the energy grid. Obviously, they draw some solar energy for their own use. The rest of the energy goes into the local grid. Again, having a feed-in tariff that you could rely on to pay a market-viable price for those sorts of projects, which we understand are more expensive than, say, burning coal, which we are going to get rid of, makes these projects much more viable.

Another thing, and I hear this from people like farmers and individuals who are trying to bring on a renewable energy project, is that there would be one point of entry into the government for the application process. Large corporations can deal with having to have lawyers and deal with a lot of different ministries for a lot of different permits, but that's very frustrating for the small proponent. So what this bill will do is have one entry point into the Ontario government for permits so that you can deal with MOE and MNR and whatever other permits are required with one-stop shopping.

In addition to that, this bill will introduce, and we've had some discussion about this, common setbacks for renewable energy projects. This is one of these things where it's a relatively new area, and, yes, some municipalities have moved forward and set their own standards, but what's happening is we're rapidly getting a mishmash of standards around Ontario. We need to have some commonality as to what the standards are for renewable projects, and this bill will bring us to this. They will be science-based. They will be based on looking at not just wind energy but health and safety considerations. They will be based on expert advice and not just whatever the political push and shove is in particular municipalities. So that will help proponents bring things to market.

Another problem that we've certainly noted in my part of the country: Guelph happens to be one of those communities that's at the end of the grid, so to speak. We noticed this very much during the great blackout of 2003: that Guelph was one of the last major municipalities in Ontario to come back up. We were out for several days.

That's because we were literally at the end of the grid. That's when people in Guelph and area started to think about the fact that our transmission lines in Ontario aren't necessarily as robust or as extensive as we need to meet current energy systems. There are two things that will happen as a result of this bill that are helpful. Number one, it will streamline approvals for large transmission projects so that we can get those transmission projects that will let us move renewable energy around the province up and going.

The other problem that small producers—farmers—are often having is that they want to have their own private windmill, they want to have a biomass project on their farm, but they go to Ontario Hydro and they're told, "No, you can't connect. The lines won't handle it." What we are doing is establishing a right-to-connect philosophy, which means we will facilitate the connection of those renewable projects rather than what tends to have been happening in many cases: the distribution company saying, "No, you can't really do that." This will help with encouraging getting power into the grid.

One of the things that is also happening in my community, and we're going to encourage this with the legislation, is that there's actually a co-op energy group that's looking at a group of homeowners having a co-op to have solar energy projects in their homes. This legislation will foster that.

That feeds into something the city of Guelph and Guelph Hydro developed a couple of years ago, the Guelph energy plan, which is looking at community energy generation to increase the renewable energy we can generate right in our own community, but also looking at community energy conservation. This bill will also help with the conservation piece.

For the first time, we're actually going to look at the building code, in terms of revising it to make energy efficiency a consideration when we're looking at building code rules. Right now, we obviously look at safety and construction standards in the building code, but we don't really think about energy efficiency. We're going to address that for new builds in the province of Ontario. We're going to require public sector building owners to have energy conservation plans, and that will be throughout the public sector—those large institutions that populate all our communities.

In terms of individuals, however, we will be requiring that new appliances meet energy efficiency standards—the sort of Energy Star standards you may see on some appliances when you go into a store. We're going to make sure all new appliances in Ontario meet those important standards.

We're working on something that my hydro distribution company is very pleased with, which is setting conservation targets for local distribution companies, because they often know what can best be done.

I'm absolutely delighted with these steps toward producing renewable energy and also conserving energy, but the side effect of all this is going to be a lot of economic activity. For example, we're going to set a made-

in-Ontario standard so that we ensure that part of the components of these new builds are, in fact, made in Ontario. We're projecting that there will be 50,000 new jobs in manufacturing, assembly, transportation, engineering, construction and computer software and hardware. So this is good for the economy and good for conservation and the environment. I'm very willing to support this act.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I want to respond to the member from Guelph. Certainly, the inch this bill puts forward is the inch that cuts red tape. What it doesn't do is what it purports to do, which is to really assist Ontarians with moving toward renewable energy.

Again, I appreciated the member from Ottawa—Orléans standing up and trying to make the case for the fact that governments help us retrofit our homes, businesses and apartment buildings, but quite frankly, that's just not the case. We have hundreds of thousands of laid-off workers in Ontario, we have people who can barely afford to pay the rent and feed their children, and we're the child poverty capital of the world. How could he even think that with whatever disposable income most Ontarians are blessed with, a few hundred dollars from a level of government against a \$10,000 retrofit bill is going to help them move forward in that direction? It doesn't; it won't; it hasn't. That's the reality.

In terms of the broader sweep of the bill, of course, I've already spoken about that. It really is just a greenwashing of the total agenda of this government, which is to spend as much money as we've ever spent on anything in this province on nuclear reactors.

So I just say to Ontario that if you're with David Suzuki, if you're with Greenpeace, if you're with Pembina, if you're with the Ontario Clean Air Alliance, you can't help but see this bill as what it is. It's greenwashing, that great word invented just for the very likes of this bill, Bill 150. If you want to see renewable energy and if you want to see Ontario move dramatically forward, which is what we need—we need dramatic action on this front—you're not going to find it and you're not going to see it in Bill 150.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I just wanted to add a few comments to what the member from Guelph had to say earlier. She spoke well on the bill, especially on some of the details of the bill. I'm going to have an opportunity to speak to the bill myself shortly, but I just wanted to say that what's really important to realize in her comments is that if we don't make change and make it fast, we're going to lose, and we're going to lose on two fronts: We're going to lose on the environmental front and we're also going to lose on the employment front. The jobs of the future are the green jobs and the environment of the future is a green environment.

She pointed out more of the specifics and fleshed out some of the details in this bill, which I'm going to have

an opportunity to do as well. But if we don't start doing that, if we don't take action now, but sit back—and with the greatest of respect to the comments made earlier by some of the other speakers, the time to act is now. Every day we wait, the planning gets a little bit less green and more people are losing jobs every day. All you need to do is turn on the television and see it.

This is not a cure-all for everything, but it's a start in the right direction. The jobs in the future will be green jobs. People will be employed in the green sector. Also, on top of that, the environment needs to be addressed; this bill does that. Where the government points its finger and says, "This is the way that we think is best to go"—in consultation, because the bill provides consultation in here—it's clearly an open invitation to involve those in the community, to be creative, to be innovative and to start bringing out ideas. It's not that much different from what happened with computers back 10, 20, 30 years ago. I'll have more to say about that later, but I thank you for the chance to speak.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have a chance to add some comments to the speech from the member from Guelph on Bill 150, the green energy bill. I guess this government's actions to this point have not necessarily matched its words, and what better example of that than their promise in 2003 that they were going to shut down the coal-fired electricity generating stations by 2007? Now, I believe the current promise is 2014. I wish them well with that.

I have to put a plug in for my own riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka in their bid to find some substitute for coal and suggest that I know there are businesses in Parry Sound–Muskoka that are participating in the request for proposals from MNR and OPG towards supplying wood pellets. It may work, may make sense to use them in a coal-fired electricity generating station, and I would certainly hope that the government will consider our location. Parry Sound–Muskoka, in terms of an area that has forest products, is reasonably close to southern Ontario. That should be an area that's considered. I know the government has talked about 50,000 jobs supposedly being created by this bill. I think they picked that number out of a hat, frankly, but if there are jobs to be created, certainly Parry Sound–Muskoka would be a good location for some of these combined heat-powered generating stations that would also produce wood pellets that may be used in a coal-fired generating station.

I'm trying to assist the government to keep a promise, and that is the one they made to shut down coal-fired electric generation by 2014, and hopefully stimulate some jobs in Parry Sound–Muskoka at the same time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

The member for Guelph, you have two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the members from Parkdale–High Park, Scarborough Southwest and Parry Sound–Muskoka for their comments.

There was a comment about our past actions, and I would like to actually agree that if you want to look at people's future intents, it's good to look at their past actions. With respect to the coal-fired generators, in fact, we have closed the largest of those coal-fired generators and are on target to close the rest. But what have we done in the green energy file? We've already brought about a thousand megawatts of new renewable energy since October 2003; the two largest wind farms in Canada are located in Ontario, new since 2003; and by the end of 2009, nearly 1,200 megawatts of wind capacity will be online, enough to power almost 325,000 homes. Investments in new renewable energy projects already in place or under construction in Ontario total about \$4 billion and in fact, I understand, if my recollection serves me, that some of that financing may be going into the riding of the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka because I believe there are some new small water-energy hydro projects in his riding. To date, the Ontario home energy savings program has provided \$38 million to assist homeowners with over 42,000 energy-efficient retrofits. So, in fact, our fellow citizens are retrofitting their homes with assistance from our government, and this bill will further facilitate that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to address Bill 150, the so-called Green Energy Act, or, more recently coined, the greenwash act. I want to start off by making it very clear that I support green energy. Every member of this Legislature would acknowledge the importance of protecting our environment, and I agree that clean energy and green energy are an important part of that goal. However, we need to look at how we get there. We need to ensure that energy developments are sustainable, that they don't do further damage to our economy, and we need to make sure that these developments are part of a long-term plan that ensures that the lights will stay on in Ontario.

One of the things it appears that the McGuinty government seems to be trying to hide is the fact that, currently, generating green energy is significantly more expensive than the existing energy that we generate. They are guaranteeing prices for this energy that are far above the current average. As the amount of green energy at that cost going into the hydro grid increases, this is going to become unsustainable. Whether the cost is passed on directly to the consumers or whether the government provides direct subsidies, it is a cost that is going to be borne by the people of Ontario. Our taxpayers and businesses can't afford to pay three or four times the current rate for power. Our manufacturing businesses are already struggling to survive. Every day, we hear about more plants closing and more layoffs.

In a recent survey I did of businesses in Oxford, 37% of businesses said they will have to downsize this year. If we see hydro rates double or triple, how many more layoffs will we have? How many more businesses will be forced out of Ontario? During the clause-by-clause on the

Planning and Conservation Land Statute Law Amendment Act, the Liberal member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell acknowledged the impact of high electricity costs on businesses. He said, “We keep hearing in this House that the paper mills are closing because of the cost of electricity, and in my home riding there was a windshield manufacturer that was really affected.”

How many other businesses are already struggling with hydro costs? How many others will be forced to close their doors if rates or other charges on the bill start rapidly increasing? The initial transmission investment alone that the McGuinty government is talking about is \$5 billion, which works out to \$1,200 per metered electricity customer in the province of Ontario. Add that to the cost of smart meters and the increased rates due to the guarantees the government is offering to the green energy companies and there is no doubt that the people and businesses across Ontario are about to be hit with significant increases. All of these costs will be set and forced upon taxpayers behind closed doors, with no consultation required. In fact, the province will now be able to dictate all the terms of green energy projects without the support of the people who will be affected.

Many of us have received letters from people who live near wind farms—and this is, again, the challenge of dealing with renewable energy behind closed doors. Many of us have received letters from people who live near wind farms. They raise some legitimate concerns about proper distance for setbacks or how far the wind turbines must be located from homes. I’ve never spent the night in a house located close to a turbine, and I would bet that the same is true for Mr. McGuinty, the energy minister or, in fact, the entire cabinet. So why would we trust them to make the decision, behind closed doors, through regulations, on how far turbines should be from homes? Why wouldn’t they ask the people who are presently living next to the turbines, to see what the proper distance should be? Why would we want to cut municipalities, and the people who have experienced living near turbines or are going to have them near their homes, out of this decision?

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Most of the people who have written aren’t saying that there should be no turbines. They’re just saying that we need to have them far enough away that the vibration and stray voltage aren’t a problem. That doesn’t seem unreasonable to me.

Many farmers in Ontario are already dealing with the effects of stray voltage on their livestock. Shouldn’t they have a right to be part of the discussion on new energy projects? Wouldn’t their input be useful when deciding how far away energy projects should be from their livestock?

I recently met with a constituent, Keith Leeson, who lives near a number of proposed turbines and is very concerned about the impact that any stray voltage would have. He provided me with an engineering report prepared for the Ontario Energy Board by Kinectrics which outlines some of the problems of stray voltage and looks

at a few of the possible solutions. Before the government imposes new energy projects on neighbourhoods and municipalities, shouldn’t we ensure that we understand the stray voltage that will be generated and how we should deal with it?

The Minister of Energy recognizes the value of local communities when it comes to local distribution companies. In an interview he recently said, “I guess the biggest strength of the LDCs is to be found in the ‘L,’ which is ‘local,’ or to put it another way, it’s community. I think that what we’re really talking about, the strength of the LDCs, is to be found in their connection to the community and their ability to operate at that level.” That’s a quote of the Minister of Energy. Yet at the same time, he’s pushing through a bill that will take decision-making away from local municipalities. This bill will force municipalities to accept energy projects wherever the province decides they should be located and however the province decides they should be built. It will remove the ability of municipalities to negotiate with energy companies to ensure that the costs of building and maintaining municipal infrastructure for the site are paid for by the company, not the property taxpayers.

During the committee hearings on Bill 130, the Municipal Statute Law Amendment Act, the parliamentary assistant for municipal affairs and housing, who is now the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, boasted about how much this government respected municipalities, when they were giving the city of Toronto new taxing powers. He said, “we’re showing confidence in the judgment of municipalities to determine, and give them the flexibility they need to ensure that they can make good decisions.” That was on December 11, 2006. But the attitude seems to have completely changed in the last two years. Perhaps the McGuinty government is becoming more arrogant. Perhaps they no longer believe that municipal governments are capable of good decisions. Or maybe they believe that decisions about imposing new taxes on citizens are less important than decisions about where to locate green energy projects.

In committee hearings on the Planning and Conservation Land Statute Law Amendment Act just two and a half years ago, the member from Oakville said, “All proponents in Ontario, for any energy projects, are encouraged to follow the municipal process. That’s clearly the intent of the government. I think that’s clearly what the public would like to see, and I believe all political parties would like to see that.” I’m here today to say I agree with the member from Oakville that day, yet just two and a half years later his own party is going against his position. His own party is cutting municipalities out of the planning process.

Under this bill, the government will establish feed-in tariffs to assist companies in developing green energy projects. This allows the government to give more subsidies to ineffective projects to make them economically viable, instead of trying to create the most effective energy sources. For example, a wind farm that is located in an area with limited wind may receive a rate for their

power that is far higher than that for a wind farm in a more ideal location. That just isn't the smart way to build.

The McGuinty government is once again showing that they are catering to popular opinion and governing this province by polling. The Green Energy Act sounds like a great title for a bill. But it's not enough for a government to come out with great-sounding bills. They need a plan to ensure that our province has a clean, affordable supply of energy and that they have enough power to keep the lights on.

In 2003, McGuinty ran on the promise to close the coal-fired plants by 2007, then 2009, and now he's extended that again. So far, there has been no progress in installing scrubbers to make the energy generated at those plants cleaner, and little progress towards replacing the energy from the coal-fired plants or anywhere else.

I believe we should be supporting clean, renewable energy. However, we need to ensure that we don't support this bill just because it has the right name. Instead, we need to really consider the impact that this bill will have and whether it will achieve its goals. That is why we're calling for immediate and extensive committee hearings, so we can make the changes necessary to ensure that we are leaving not only a healthy environment for our grandchildren but also a strong economy and an energy generation system that works.

Thank you very much for allowing me to put my few thoughts on this bill on the record.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Again, I reiterate the offer: There is a wonderful brochure in my office, put together by serious environmentalists—David Suzuki, Pembina, Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund, Ontario Clear Air Alliance—that outlines exactly the way we should move in terms of energy for this province. Not a part of it is nuclear. It is highly dependent on conservation, it is highly dependent on renewables and it has all been thought out by folk who have way more knowledge at their fingertips than anybody here in this House. My only question really is, if this government was serious about being green, why don't they implement it? That's the question.

Here we have a plan that has no substantive money behind it to do very little in the way of substantive changes. It's not in concurrence with environmentalists. As I've said, I haven't heard David Suzuki's name once in this discussion from the other side. Quite frankly, it doesn't do anything to help the consumer of energy either—those folk who are having a hard time paying their utility bills, those folk who would like to retrofit their houses but can't afford it. Quite frankly, we're talking about the vast majority of Ontarians who are in that boat right now.

This is, as I said—and I'll say it again because I love the word—a greenwashing bill. Does it do something? Yes, it does something. It does an inch where we need millions of miles. It does a small, little bit about the red tape that goes into getting your projects approved.

But we've heard that the wind producers aren't happy about it. They don't feel it's going to help them. These are the very people, supposedly, that this bill is aimed to help. Who does it make happy? One very significant group; it makes happy all of those who are lobbying for nuclear and nuclear reactors in Ontario. We've all had them visit our offices. I know I have. It was a very spiffy display. Clearly, that's what this bill is aimed at—pleasing them.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I was certainly interested to listen to the member from Oxford talk about stray voltage. As my first private member's bill, I actually introduced a private member's bill about stray voltage. I think the member from Oxford should understand that wind turbines do not create stray voltage. Stray voltage is something that has been with us for at least three decades. It is something that is related to the transmission lines. It's how we move the current away from the wind turbines. The wind turbines themselves are not the source of stray voltage. As we talk about what we will do in terms of remedying the stray voltage situation, Dwight Duncan, when he was Minister of Energy, created a panel through the Ontario Energy Board to research the issue. That is still being undertaken right now. There is a discussion paper. I'm hopefully awaiting the response and the recommendations coming from the Ontario Energy Board to deal with this. We recognize it as a problem that we have had with our transmission and distribution system. It is certainly not something that is a problem with wind turbines. So I think we need to address the situation where it really sits.

Earlier the member from Oshawa talked about the Wesleyville project, which is located in the Northumberland—Quinte West riding. I think we should also remind the members there that they allowed the EA on that particular project to expire in 2002, and that's why that project hasn't moved forward at all.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I think this is another one of those cases where the emperor wears new clothes and we're all supposed to admire this as though there really were something there to admire.

This act is being touted to allegedly reduce the carbon footprint in Ontario. There have been no carbon reduction targets set and I'm sure that there aren't going to be any set, and the reason for that is that there probably won't be any significant reductions in the carbon footprint.

The minister talks about subsidies that will support renewable power. This will be accomplished through the feed-in tariffs. That's how it works in Europe, and that's where we're taking our example. In Europe, prices have soared as much as 40% for electricity and energy, and I'm not sure the people of Ontario understand how all that is going to happen. The sorry part of all that is that

the carbon footprint is no smaller now than it was before they started renewable energy and feed-in tariffs in Europe.

Clean, renewable energy is a good goal. This is motherhood; how can anybody argue with it? This important decision, the magnitude of this long-lasting decision, is something that we ought to take very seriously and carefully—listen to the people it's going to directly affect. I think that it behooves us to listen to Ontarians, as they want to tell us about their personal experiences and their thoughts. Just because it's opposing what the government is presenting doesn't mean we shouldn't listen. Isn't that democracy? What happened to democracy in this House? So I think that we need to have long and meaningful consultation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to stand in my place in this House to talk about Bill 150 and how important it is to the future of this province.

The smart grid implementation, I suppose, has had the greatest degree of comment. It's \$5 billion and it's to support the establishment and implementation of a smart grid for Ontario, which will bring on additional renewable energy projects and set the stage for the electric car, solar panels on roofs, distributed generation etc.

I think this is one of the things that our government has done since we came here in 2003: We've invested in infrastructure. We have to look at the deficiencies in the grid in Ontario. This has to be a great investment for the next five years and a great investment for the future of our province. We have to make those investments. They were made in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and unfortunately in the 1990s those investments were not made.

The minister is on record as saying that the cost of that \$5-billion investment in the grid is going to be 1% per year on electrical bills. When we hear the figures from this member, we're talking about significant dollars. It's something that's going to be invested for 30 or 40 years, and that's the way it should be paid for. It's going to be there for generations down the road. What I really like about it is that there are several things for community assistance facilitation and to support community power resources through municipalities. Because we're going to have a strong grid that will be able to access these communities, we're going to see those projects going ahead.

The Minto construction in Ottawa: Just this last couple of weeks I've seen it; they have a zero-energy home. That's where we have to go, and that's where we have to get on this bandwagon of supporting this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Oxford, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to thank the members from Parkdale–High Park, Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, Burlington and Ottawa–Orléans for their kind comments.

I did want to just quickly go back to that part of my presentation that dealt with the presentation from Keith Leeson in my riding, who was in the process of dealing

with a wind turbine farm that's being built just outside his boundary. In the EA that they're presently doing for that, there was an engineer's report that I mentioned in my presentation that was done for the Ontario Energy Board that speaks of that stray voltage that will be generated from the wiring, the process of the transmission from the turbine into the grid. That's the challenge we face. There is nothing in this bill that deals with that. To get the power out of the wind and get it into the grid is where the problem is. That is all part of building the turbine facility, and that is not being addressed with this. When Keith asked me what the government is doing in Bill 150 to protect him from that stray voltage, what they are doing about the setbacks, I said, "According to the bill, the minister gets to make all those decisions." "Well," he said to me, "who is the minister accountable to?" I said, "No one but his cabinet colleagues," because this bill gives him total right over setting separation distances, dealing with the stray voltage, dealing with where they go.

They've taken the authority away from everyone, including municipalities, and put it all at the minister's desk. The application comes in. He reviews the application. If he deems that it's appropriate, he'll decide how much he is going to pay for the power to come from that facility and then he will place it in someone's backyard without ever consulting with anyone in that process. I think that's what is so distasteful to my community, that in fact they've gone through this process of the environmental assessment and now it appears it won't even finish because the minister will override it and give approval to this application without the community having any further say in it. That's the challenge that this bill is presenting to my community.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to add a few words to the debate so far.

I just want to preface my remarks by saying that it looks like a lot of the debate this afternoon is focused on detail, and although that is an important thing, we do have a process here in the Legislative Assembly where bills like this one are sent to committee. At that time, at committee, changes are made; the public is invited to come out and to speak to any potential changes. There's also an incredibly extensive process here for public consultation. So this is not a slam dunk. It's not that the bill is just in front of us here and it's going to be put into law tomorrow or the day after. I think there's going to be quite a bit of discussion, potentially some changes in the end, and I think that needs to be kept in mind.

Instead of focusing on those small little details, let's look at the broader picture of what this bill is trying to accomplish, and those are two things. I mentioned them earlier when I had a moment to speak. Number one is to ensure that Ontario becomes a leader in green technology. Number two, we want to make sure that Ontario begins to get jobs. Potentially, from what we've been able to study and ascertain, I think it's 50,000 jobs that are at stake here.

I just want to talk about a few people here and what they've had to say about this. Let's start with John Young. He was an astronaut. John Young actually flew more missions than any other astronaut. He flew on Gemini, Apollo and Skylab, and on the space shuttle missions. There's a quote of his that's kind of interesting. He says, "The human race is at total war. Our enemy is ignorance, pure and simple. The last 25 years of NASA's solar system exploration, including earth, is telling us what we need to do to preserve our species." In a movie that he was in called *In the Shadow of the Moon*, he says that from the time of Gemini, which wasn't that long ago, in the 1960s, until he flew in the space shuttle on one of his missions, he noticed while orbiting the earth that the changes were incredible. Now, above major cities, large brown clouds can be seen that were not there during the time of the Gemini flights of the 1960s. They were present in the 1990s and thereafter, and they are getting worse and worse.

But instead of looking to outer space or to John Young, one need only look across the street here at the University of Toronto. There's a professor who works here at the University of Toronto named Richard Florida. There's been some mention of him earlier. He has written a couple of very interesting books. The reason I want to bring them up is that they tie in to this bill, because this bill, as I said, is about jobs and green technology. Richard Florida, in his books *The Rise of the Creative Class*, *Cities and the Creative Class*, and also *The Flight of the Creative Class*, basically asserts that metropolitan regions with high concentrations of high-tech workers, artists, musicians and so on—he describes them as "high bohemians"—correlate with a higher level of economic development. Professor Florida posits the theory that the creative class fosters an open, dynamic, personal and professional environment. This environment, in turn, attracts more creative people, as well as businesses and capital. Professor Florida suggests that attracting and obtaining high-quality talent versus a singular focus on infrastructure projects such as sports stadiums or iconic buildings and shopping centres would be a better primary use of a city's regeneration resources for long-term prosperity.

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In simple words, I think what he's trying to say is, if you have the fertile field available, and we're trying to—that is, the government—create a fertile field with a good act here, people will come to this area, into this field and begin to utilize it and sow the seeds that will create the projects that we need. We need more Ph.D.s coming here to Toronto. We need more people who are creative and willing; more entrepreneurs. This has also been outlined by an economist who works for TD Bank, Mr. Drummond. I heard him on Saturday speaking, and he was saying that the creative group, the creative class, are the ones who are going to create the next set of jobs. And we're not talking about a few jobs here and a few jobs scattered there; we're talking about 50,000 jobs.

When I think about my riding of Scarborough Southwest, there are a lot of people who don't have jobs

right now. There are other ridings here, too, where people cannot find work. I'm seeing it more and more in my constituency office. What am I to do—support legislation that, as someone said earlier, doesn't go in this direction or that perhaps we're moving too fast? No. We're moving too slowly, or at least we're moving at a pace that allows for the proper change. We need to move in this direction as soon as possible.

I just want to point out again that Professor Florida talks about the creative class. It's a socio-economic class—distinct from a social class—that economists now know and believe are a key driving force for the economic development of post-industrial cities. We've seen a lot of industries shut down. We know that. It's not just in Toronto and not just in Ontario; it's worldwide. This creative class works in this post-industrial era. If they're going to work in this post-industrial era, how are they going to get things done? If you look at Bill 150 and you look at the preamble to Bill 150, what does the preamble to Bill 150 say? If I'm a member of this creative class, I'm going to take a look at this and I'm going to say, "This sounds pretty interesting to me."

"The government of Ontario is committed to fostering the growth of renewable energy projects, which use cleaner sources of energy, and to removing barriers to and promoting opportunities for renewable energy projects and to promoting a green economy."

Furthermore, it goes on to say: "The government of Ontario is committed to ensuring that the government ... and the broader public sector, including government-funded institutions, conserve energy and use energy efficiently in conducting their affairs."

"The government of Ontario is committed to promoting and expanding energy conservation by all Ontarians and to encouraging all Ontarians to use energy efficiently."

This is the map that allows the creative class, that allows the people who are going to make the jobs of the future, create those jobs. Those jobs are not going to be found, unfortunately, back in the manufacturing sector. Those jobs are not going to be found in the way of the past. It's not just in Ontario; this is a worldwide phenomenon. Do you want those jobs to be located only in Germany and in Switzerland and Japan? No. We want them right here in Ontario. We want to attract the right people here. This act allows them to come here and use their resources. We're not saying, "Throw away all the laws and just go ahead and build." There are going to be all sorts of consultation. It's going to go to committee. We're going to put some kinds of restrictions in place; we're not going to just let them throw up whatever they want to throw up and put into existence, but they're going to be creative, and the creative class is going to be the dominant class.

I just want to point out one more definition, and that is "innovation." The term "innovation" means a new way of doing something. To some people, that might sound scary because it involves change. But if we don't change and do things differently, we're not going to see things

get better. During the Great Depression—and I'm not saying that we're in a Great Depression—Roosevelt didn't try doing the same things; he innovated. He tried new things. In fact, in his first 100 days of office he passed more legislation, got it through Congress, than any other President in the history of the United States—and he got the economy moving.

"The goal of innovation is positive change, to make someone or something better. Innovation leading to increased productivity is the fundamental source of increasing wealth in an economy." It sounds pretty good to me, and it's not just a bunch of fluff; this is coming from some pretty reliable sources. We want to see innovation and we want to bring in the people who will do it. As Professor Florida has said, we want to bring in the Ph.D.s.; we want to have them in this location. He has said that Toronto is prime, Ontario is prime to bringing in these new individuals. If we have a law in place that allows for new green technology—not the old technology of the past but new green technology where they get to use their creative powers, their Ph.D. knowledge and their entrepreneurial skills, we will see new jobs created, because they're going to have to hire new employees to do what they have to do to create that green energy. The green energy jobs are located together and they come nicely together in this bill, Bill 150, which I stand here today and support very, very strongly.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have a chance to comment on the speech made by the member from Scarborough Southwest. He was talking about the fact that the bill will be going to committee. I'm happy to hear that. I know we were asking for committee after first reading, because it is a complicated bill, but I trust the government is going to send it to committee and get lots of input, because not everyone is in favour of this bill. It's the job of the opposition to make the government aware of those people who are critical. I note an article in the National Post by Lawrence Solomon, where he goes on, "No piece of legislation in memory will do more to simultaneously undermine Ontario's economy and environment." There are concerns out there.

The member mentioned the study done by Professor Richard Florida and Roger Martin. I think the government spent \$2.2 million on the report. I would suggest that the government could have gone to the legislative library and checked out Professor Florida's book on the creative economy. They would have saved a lot of money. That's part of what the concerns with this bill are. The original philosophy of Ontario Hydro was "Power at cost," and now it seems to be changing to "Power at any cost." The question is, what harm is going to be done to our economy, particularly at this time when businesses are struggling in this province, when every day this government introduces another bill that makes it more difficult for small business to survive in the province with their new rules, regulations and red tape?

There are some serious concerns with this bill, and I think it's important that this government allow those who

are opposed or have concerns to make their voices heard when the bill goes to the Legislative Assembly committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise and add my ideas to the debate here after hearing the member from Scarborough Southwest, who I thought made some very, very good points that we should all be paying attention to. I think what we've got going on here is two very progressive ideas that are happening at the same time. I think people in Ontario are starting to realize that we need to move to an economy that has a safe and affordable supply of clean green energy in order to drive that economy, in order to allow us to have the lifestyle that we've come to enjoy in this province. At the same time, we know that that needs to work hand in hand with the economy.

In the past, it used to be that any environmental improvements were viewed as being at the expense of economic growth. I think that over the past few years we've come to realize that you can actually have those environmental improvements, such as those that are given under the Green Energy Act, and also improve the economy at the same time.

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Some of the people who have come forward to support this proposed bill are people who certainly have my respect, and I think have the respect of most people in this House, I would hope.

Let's go to the Clean Air Foundation. Ersilia Serafini, a young woman from Oakville and the executive director of that organization, says, "We congratulate Minister Smitherman for introducing legislation that will help make it easier for Ontarians to install renewable energy and look forward to working with the province to continue to increase our energy conservation efforts."

We've heard a lot of talk today from the opposition as to things we shouldn't do, and that we should shut down nuclear and shut down coal. We are working to shut down coal. I think there's acceptance that nuclear is going to play a role in the future of this province. What the people of Ontario want to see is us all working together to ensure that that clean, green energy that we know is in place is actually bought into the energy supply stream.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to add my comments to the member from Scarborough Southwest. I find it interesting listening to his remarks. I was kind of interested, looking at an article here from the National Post the other day; he quoted this Clean Energy Alliance. Also, a number of these agencies that are supporting this green bill, Bill 150, receive funding from the Ontario government, so it's probably no wonder that they're in some agreement with it. Anyway, that's beside the point.

Someone earlier asked, "Where's David Suzuki on this?" I think it was a member of the NDP.

Mr. Mike Colle: How about Doug Chalmers?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yeah, and Doug Chalmers. I don't know what Doug Chalmers thinks of Bill 150. But somebody asked where David Suzuki was. I saw him the other night on TV. He's running around people's houses with a caulking gun and a guy gets up and chases him out. Anyway, that's where David Suzuki is; I saw him the other night on TV.

A number of these government programs—it sounds like a big shell game to me. They take the funds. Through the Ontario Energy Board, they enforce Enbridge Gas, Union Gas and others to take these fees back from the householders so that they can say that they haven't, in fact, enforced these fees. It's really a tax grab and they're enforcing this, having consumers pay it through companies. It's a real fancy kind of a shell game; you move them around on the table. The government didn't want to raise taxes, so to do this they just had the electric and gas companies raise their rates. At the end of the day, Ontarians know that, whether it's on their tax bill, their gas bill or their hydro bill, they'll be the ones who are actually paying for these pet projects of the government.

We're looking forward to these committee hearings, where we're going to try to improve this bill through many amendments. And I look forward to further debate as the day goes on.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Again, it's a pleasure to rise and speak in favour of the environment, in favour of the citizens of Ontario and against attempts to greenwash what we really face as a problem—a life-and-death problem, if you will. The member from Scarborough Southwest talked about Richard Florida; that's an interesting name to bring into this conversation.

I totally agree with the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka: We could have saved the taxpayers a lot of money by simply taking that \$2 million, reading Richard Florida's book and giving it to those folks who would like to retrofit their homes or pay their utility bills and who aren't able to. That would be a better use of taxpayers' money than commissioning a report that essentially just redid his own book and his own suggestions from that.

I leave you with the words that I want to imprint on everyone watching this: This is greenwashing—there's a word to add to your vocabulary. Why is it greenwashing? Because the actual energy policies of this government are to put in excess of \$30 billion—some experts say \$50 billion—into nuclear reactors. If you put all the money into nuclear reactors, you don't have any money left over for renewables and conservation. Fifty billion dollars, \$30 billion: These numbers are staggering. This is more than we've spent on anything in the province of Ontario.

Other words to leave with the viewers: Yes, David Suzuki. Thank you for raising his name again. Yes,

Greenpeace; yes, Pembina; yes, Ontario Clean Air Alliance; yes, World Wildlife Fund. Why did the government not give the \$2 million to them, buy the brochure, if you will, and institute it? That's what we need. We need an environmental plan for this province still.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Mississauga Southwest, you have two minutes to respond.

Interjection: Scarborough Southwest.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Scarborough Southwest. Thank you.

Mr. Mike Colle: Scarborough's a beautiful place, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It's late in the day, so forgive me. Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Mike Colle: It's never late to visit Scarborough. It's beautiful. Come to the bluffs.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I just wanted to thank the members from Parry Sound–Muskoka, Thornhill, Parkdale–High Park and Oakville for their comments.

Just very briefly, with regard to Richard Florida, please, it's not a million-dollar project; it's a book. You can buy it over at Coles or you can get a copy of it in the legislative library, or you can do what I did: I borrowed my wife's copy and read it. It didn't cost me a cent. I hope my wife's not watching because she'll probably want money for it now.

Anyway, I just wanted to say again that Richard Florida's thesis makes a lot of sense. You're not going to get to where you were in the past. You've got to look forward to the future. And it's not just him. Mr. Drummond from TD Bank, who's on TV almost every night, has said again and again that the creative, the PhDs, those who are innovative, are going to be ones who are going to create the jobs of the future. It's not me saying it. It's not the Liberal Party saying it. It's not this act saying it. It's top economists and professors who are saying this, and I'm reiterating it.

All I'm saying is that this act, Bill 150, An Act to enact the Green Energy Act, 2009, assists those who want to be involved in something new, and they will be attracted to this bill and will want to take action on it. I want to see people in my riding, Scarborough Southwest—and I don't know about the member from Parkdale–High Park, who says this is a greenwash—working in jobs, whether they be in the green sector or elsewhere. I want them employed and I want them as part of the solution and not part of the problem.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you to everyone.

There's at least one timepiece in this House that reads 6 o'clock or some proximity thereto. This House is adjourned until Tuesday morning at 9 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1757.

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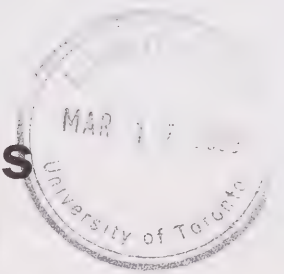
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Tuesday 10 March 2009

Mardi 10 mars 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 10 March 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 10 mars 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the Baha'i prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT ACT (ORGAN DONOR LEAVE), 2009 LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI (CONGÉ POUR DON D'ORGANE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 4, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 154, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of organ donor leave / Projet de loi 154, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé pour don d'organe.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: It's with great pride that I introduce Mr. Frank Markel, CEO and president, and Ms. Sandra Fawcett, director of public affairs and communications for the Trillium Gift of Life. I want to commend them for their hard work.

You may know that the Trillium Gift of Life is an agency whose goal and responsibility is to increase tissue and organ donations in Ontario. We should all take pride in the fact that such passionate people are leading this very important organization.

Mr. Bill Mauro: It's my pleasure to be able to carry on with my comments from last week on Bill 154. It's a very important piece of legislation, as I think we all understand. I've been told I have four or five minutes here this morning with which to carry on before we hear the leadoff from the third party.

The backdrop for this particular piece of legislation that we've brought forward here today—I think there are a few numbers worth putting out there for the public to remember. I know most of the people interested in this issue will be familiar with these numbers, but perhaps many are not. That is that, unfortunately, on a year-to-year basis, there are approximately 1,700 people on an organ transplant waiting list in the province of Ontario. I think that's close to what the number was last year. In Ontario last year, we managed to conduct 863 trans-

plants, with 1,700 people on a waiting list. Out of that 863 transplants that we did, 260, or approximately 30% of those transplants, came from live donors. Unfortunately, out of that 1,700 on that waiting list, one in three people in the province of Ontario will die while they are waiting for an organ transplant. That's the backdrop for what we're doing here today.

So in response to this, in the late fall of 2006, our government, under the direction and leadership of Premier McGuinty, announced the citizens' panel. The focus and the goal of the citizens' panel was to go out and review public opinion, to engage stakeholders, including labour, employers and multiple stakeholders, in this debate. One of the key things that the citizens' panel came back with as a recommendation was that unpaid, job-protected leave be supplied in the province of Ontario. It's my understanding that, should this pass, Ontario will become the first jurisdiction in Canada to provide such unpaid, job-protected leave. So that's the background for this, and of course if it's passed, it will be those people affected by the Employment Standards Act, 2000, who will be affected by this legislation.

I had an opportunity last week to listen to some of the debate on this particular piece of legislation and have heard the opposition, as is their role, to some degree minimize what they see as the potential effect of this particular legislation. But I think it's important that we restate the numbers. When 1,700 people are on a list, when one in three are dying waiting for an organ transplant, if this legislation were only to affect two people or five people or 10 people to be able to receive an organ from a live organ donor, that would be two people or five people or 10 people whose lives will be saved. So while there is minimization going on around this particular bill, it's important to remember that this is a key recommendation that came back to us from a citizens' panel, and it will, in fact, enhance the likelihood of someone receiving an organ from a live donor, so I think it's key.

One of the other things that I don't think has been spoken to and resonates with me as a northern member representing the riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan is that there is an expenses part associated with the unpaid, job-protected leave that we're bringing in in Bill 154. It's important to know that those people who engage in this and offer themselves up to be a live organ donor—contained in the legislation, there are a variety of things that are going to be covered as eligible expenses for them. Those expenses include travel, parking and transit, meals, accommodation, meal allowance and a subsidy for loss of income after surgery. I can tell you, as someone who

comes from a northern rural riding, it's important that I articulate to the people who are interested in this that that, in fact, is part of this particular piece of legislation.

By way of example, I'll mention briefly—my time is almost up—one example of how this has helped our group in northern Ontario in terms of including and accommodating expenses when it comes to health care services. In the run-up to the election in 2003, I made a commitment to enhance cardiac care services in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan, and, in fact, for all of northwestern Ontario. We have seen very recently the beginning, in the last year or two, of the provision of angioplasty services out of Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre for the first time.

Up until this point, people from northwestern Ontario, including the city of Thunder Bay and all of the smaller townships in my riding—Conmee, O'Connor, Neebing, Gillies, Oliver Paipoonge, Atikokan, the city of Thunder Bay and all the communities in northwestern Ontario—would have to, up until that point, leave their home community and fly to southern Ontario—Ottawa, Hamilton, Toronto and other points—to receive angioplasty service. Associated with that service that was not provided in our community of northwestern Ontario was an expense for the people who travelled with their family members when and if they could. Many people were unable to travel along with their loved ones when they had to leave our community for that service. What we have done now by providing the service closer to home is remove that expense part that was previously associated with family members having to travel with a loved one who was in need of angioplasty service.

I have been asked this morning to keep my comments to five minutes or so, so I'm going to wrap up. But I do want to conclude by reminding people that while it is being articulated by some that it will be a small number of people who are impacted by this legislation, as I mentioned, when one person is dying every three days in the province of Ontario waiting for a transplant, I think that this piece of legislation will be well received by people interested in the issue. I thank you very much.

0910

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to comment on the speech from the member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan on Bill 154, which is An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of organ donor leave. It's a fairly thin bill, but what it does is provide for 13 weeks' unpaid leave for someone who makes the decision to donate an organ.

The member said it's an important bill. I would say that the bill is dealing with an important issue, certainly, but just one tiny, tiny part of an issue. We have these huge waiting lists of people waiting for the donation of an organ. This may make a small difference, but there's so much more that could be done that isn't being done by the government. So this government needs to take some real action to reduce the waiting lists for people who are desperately waiting for an organ transplant.

I would say that education is one place that could be improved dramatically. I know Frank Klees and Peter Kormos both had private members' bills to raise the awareness of organ donation and get more people involved. I believe that Mr. Klees's bill would require that everyone applying for a health card or for a driver's licence would have to make a decision about whether they wanted to donate an organ. They'd have to either say yes, no or undecided, so that at least everyone in the province would think about it and be involved. That's what we need to do. We need to get far more people involved and participating in organ donation in this province.

This bill—as I say, it's an important issue. Whether it's an important bill—well, it's one tiny slice of what's involved in terms of increasing organ donation and shortening those lists here in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I will indeed be speaking to this bill on second reading later this morning. I know my colleague Cheri DiNovo from Parkdale—High Park has a strong interest in this issue, this matter and this legislation.

Look, this is the most modest proposal that we are going to vote for, and it won't be a protracted second reading debate. In fact, we're going to argue that it should go to committee for but perhaps one day so we can question some of the players involved and see if there's any way that we can fine-tune—or any need to fine-tune—this proposal.

But I seize the opportunity, and I appreciate this legislation being before us, because, of course, it gives me a chance to talk about radical transformation of organ donor culture in this province and in this country. People know that there have been a whole lot of people—New Democrats have joined in the debate—advocating for a process that is more similar to the European model, and that's the model of so-called presumed consent.

I say that this is a most modest proposal. I will be advocating as well that if we're going to do this—because there's a distinction to be made between living donors and dead donors; obviously this doesn't apply to dying or dead donors—really, the next stage has got to be for this government, in collaboration, if need be, with the federal government, to ensure that there's at least some modest income replacement during this 13-week period that's being discussed. The leave of absence alone, without the salary support, becomes meaningless for a whole lot of folks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I certainly want to compliment the member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan on his remarks and obviously his support for this government initiative. It's one that has particular resonance all across the province, of course, but certainly up in northwestern Ontario, where the member and I both represent our constituents. The fact is that the increased education and awareness of people is so crucial.

I had the opportunity—and I think the member, in his early remarks, made reference to the work efforts going on by Nishnawbe Grand Chief Stan Beardy. Mr. Markel, the CEO of Trillium Gift of Life, and myself were at an event where Grand Chief Beardy launched a campaign to bring about increased awareness among the 49 First Nations that the Nishnawbe Aski represents, which is a huge number of communities, certainly taking up a large part of the land mass in the province. This was a difficult issue for him as well. Grand Chief Beardy, as I think people in this House know, very tragically lost his son several years ago. The decision was made by Grand Chief Beardy and his wife Nellie to donate their son's organs. As a result of that and other thoughtfulness from them, they decided to launch this campaign.

It was a really special event and one that was very, very touching. We were able to listen to a young man from one of the First Nations in NAN who was waiting for an organ transplant and has been waiting some time for it, and spoke to somebody else who had actually had a transplant and what a difference it made in her life. So this is an issue that continues to be one that really strikes home all the time. Of course, obviously, for representatives of people who often have to go to Toronto to wait for a long time to get that transplant, there were some really wonderful stories. Others don't end so happily.

I support this initiative and compliment the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan for his remarks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan, Mr. Mauro, made comments that I could have no problem agreeing with at all, looking at this very small bill here. Really, as has been said in the preamble to the bill, it's just giving 13 weeks off for those who participate in organ donation. Of course, this is without pay. I don't think there'll be much of a barrier to people agreeing with this.

Now, I am interested in the member from Welland, who I gather will speak next, and the member from Newmarket–Aurora, Mr. Klees. Mr. Klees's position was one of choice when you complete your driver's licence, I believe, whereas Mr. Kormos' bill was one of implied consent, what we called a reverse onus. The onus is on the individual to make an exception for themselves and to not be included in willingly donating their organs.

There's a lot of discussion about it. I'm interested in the debate this morning because I would be supportive of this. Any move that we, as individuals, could do to save a life is a worthy moral comment on our belief in life, so I would be supportive.

Now, I guess the debate about the donor is key. I think what we're doing this morning is trying to educate the public in a broader sense, and ourselves specifically, about the generosity of those that donate, whether it's their own blood or, indeed, organs. So it is an important debate. This bill should pass without a lot of barriers. I will look forward to the comments by the member from Welland this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I'll return to the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan, who has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the members from Parry Sound–Muskoka, Welland, Thunder Bay–Superior North and Durham for their comments this morning.

There have been references made in some of the comments here this morning that there is more that can be done on this particular issue in order to enhance organ donation. I don't think there's anybody here who's going to disagree with that; the question is what and how, and during the comments made by people this morning, I did not necessarily hear the what or the how. If I were to graft onto anything, I think the comments made by my colleague from Thunder Bay–Superior North in terms of education and awareness are perhaps, at the end of the day, going to be the best way that we in the province of Ontario are going to be able to enhance opportunities around this issue in this province.

When I think of organizations that have done a lot of great work in terms of changing a culture, I think that's exactly what this is. What we're doing here today, through this legislation and through our continued efforts and the efforts of many other stakeholders on this issue, is trying to change the culture that exists not only in our province, but, I think, right across the country and internationally, it's probably fair to say, in terms of engaging people more in terms of voluntarily becoming organ donors. That is what we're trying to do. This is one small piece of it that we all acknowledge will go a way to enhancing organ donation through the job-protected leave.

0920

But education and awareness is clearly the way to go. We've heard about Grand Chief Stan Beardy from Thunder Bay; I talked about that a bit last week in my remarks. That's the kind of effort that's going to go a long way to changing the culture.

I think of organizations like MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, which have gone a long way over the last 20 to 25 years to creating and changing the culture that was associated with drinking and driving. That's the kind of grassroots-based organization and effort that I think is needed in the province of Ontario to ultimately get us to the point that we need to be at, and that is getting more people to become voluntary organ donors.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm very pleased to recognize the member for Welland.

Mr. Peter Kormos: —most especially for your patience with me as I shuffled over to my desk, hoping that—

Mr. Tim Hudak: Are you out of breath?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I'm not that old—hoping, or anticipating, that perhaps there was going to be more debate in rotation.

I'm going to make it very clear at the onset: New Democrats support this legislation. We're going to vote for it and debate—

Interruption.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Oh, the member from Hamilton Mountain has her cellphone ringing, her BlackBerry. That's the very reason they should be banned in this chamber.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Kormos: It's a CrackBerry, not a BlackBerry.

A very modest proposal is contained in this legislation, and we support it. The debate on second reading is not going to be lengthy. Ms. DiNovo, our member for Parkdale-High Park, wants to participate in the debate, and the government House leader has in fact accommodated her because she can't be here this morning.

I suspect that the bill will pass on a voice vote the next time it's called for second reading. I expect that the bill will go to committee, because I want to have some of the experts in committee—not the committee members, but attending that committee—giving us advice as to whether this bill needs any tweaking at all, whether it will serve its purpose, its very limited purpose, in the long term.

My concern, of course, is that this bill in and of itself will have little impact on increasing the number of organs available. It will eliminate some of the discomfort of living organ donors, but I suspect that it will not eliminate the quantity of organ donations from living donors.

The companion piece, the second half, the second shoe that surely would have to drop for this bill to have a more significant impact and for this bill to recognize that a living donor is truly making a gift—there's been a culture developed around organ donation that I believe has to be turned on its head, and that is the sense that an organ donation from a dead or deceased donor is a gift. That's not a gift. It doesn't cost you anything. It doesn't put you into any pain. It doesn't put you into any misery. Somebody is simply rescuing an organ from a corpse that would otherwise be burned or buried.

But a living donor truly is making a sacrifice. They're going through an uncomfortable surgical procedure that varies, depending upon what's being donated or what's being retrieved. They're talking about the prospect of hospitalization, the prospect of recovery time and the prospect of being away from work.

So if this provides a little bit of comfort and some assurance to working people—because, you see, the other argument is that there aren't that many people left working in the province of Ontario—but if this provides a little bit of comfort to a potential living donor, to be assured that their job will still be there when they finish this medical procedure of donating an organ or tissue, then so be it.

But I question why this government—because this government has talked a big game about organ donation. I know it's a sexy issue. They've talked a big game about organ donation. They know it captures people's attention and it makes them look warm and fuzzy and kind-hearted, but—

Mr. John O'Toole: The task force.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. O'Toole reminds me, as if that was necessary, of the blue ribbon task force: Brent Hawkes; my dear old friend Alvin Curling, who had just been fired by the Prime Minister from his brief sinecure in that small Caribbean country as ambassador from Canada.

Where is the income replacement component? Again, it's not necessarily ensuring an increase, because, again, I've challenged the government to come up with a single person who has been fired as a result of taking medical time off as a living donor to go through a medical procedure. There may well be that person, and I suspect that if there were that person, he or she would have been trotted out before the media already, because that's just the nature of the beast. So that makes this bill, I suppose, in many respects purely prophylactic: "in case of" and "to provide assurance that." But if this is the best that this government has got to give when it comes to organ donation, we're still in serious trouble here in the province of Ontario.

Look, huge amounts of money have been spent trying to increase public awareness around organ donation, advertising campaigns, television; Don Cherry, xenophobic old Don Cherry, who, regardless of his political stripe, where he is on the political spectrum or who he tends to spend time with, is a Canadian icon. Anybody who ever watches hockey, and that's the vast majority of Canadians, know who is Don Cherry is, and for good reasons or bad, consider him pretty authoritative. So if Don Cherry couldn't dramatically raise the number of people who sign organ donor cards, couldn't break through that glass ceiling, if the huge expenditures on advertising couldn't do that, it means that we are not putting the resources in the right place at the right time or that the culture, the structure, is wrong.

I've got to tell you: I first became actively interested—everybody's interested in organ donation, either because if you ever need one, you hope there's one there for you. There isn't a single Canadian who wouldn't want to save a life if given the opportunity. I was a kid when I remember Christiaan Barnard and that first heart transplant. That was considered miraculous, wasn't it? You're too young, Speaker; the Solicitor General remembers. But that was considered a miracle. It was leading-edge technology and very, very experimental. People who were receiving the organs were considered lucky to survive another week or so. There was all sorts of work done because bodies would reject the foreign tissue and the infections and these sorts of things.

But I'm told now—I go down here to the hospital strip and listen to announcements made by Trillium and listen to the doctors involved—that organ transplant is a pretty routine procedure, and the best possible technology exists right here in Ontario. And it's considered routine, not simplistic or simple, but routine. We've got the doctors and the nurses—sometimes—and we've got the technology. They know how to do it, and they do it well, and the survival rate with transplants is tremendous and growing.

I first became, as I say, actively involved in this whole issue, in the campaign for this revolution, this turning the organ donation culture 180 degrees, when George Marcello visited Notre Dame High School down in Welland. I'll bet you George has hectored every member of this assembly and their predecessors over the course of many years, and I commend him for it. He has been provocative and he has been persistent, and he has annoyed as many people as he could, and he has done it for good reason. But George Marcello was down in Welland at Notre Dame High School, and he was on one of his cross-country tours with a hopeful recipient, a young man who was hoping to receive an organ, just a young boy. I had a chance to speak at that event at Notre Dame. I met George for the first time. Joe Mollica, who's a local tradesperson, was there, too. Joe has been active in this movement, the organ donor movement. He's an old bricklayer, bricklayers' union. I've known Joe all my life. His family lived on Crowland Avenue just down from my family—that is, my grandparents and his parents. He grew up with my aunts and uncles. His father was a cement contractor. He poured many a sidewalk in Welland in the post-war era. Joe Mollica—and his brother, Patsy, has been a good friend of mine, too, for many years. I served on city council with Patsy. Joe Mollica was there, and Joe was as enthusiastic as I've ever seen him about this Marcello campaign, this cross-country tour. I think at that point it was George Marcello's second one.

0930

I was asked to speak at Notre Dame. I had reflected on the issue, on the matter. I'm well aware of the organ donor card, of course. I've signed many of them because, of course, they keep falling apart in my wallet or ending up in the washing machine. That's one of the problems with the organ donor card, and I hope to get a chance to talk about that.

Most Ontarians, we know, from the polling, from the data, from the surveys, want their organs to be used. Unfortunately, most Ontarians don't sign organ donor cards. So there's a disconnect there. Young people have an entirely different view about organ donation than their parents do, whether it's in elementary schools or high schools or even community colleges, where I've been with George Marcello or on my own, talking about the transformation of the organ donor culture. Young people are incredibly eager to see their organs used and willing to talk very candidly about it. I don't know why. Maybe it's because of some of the pop culture, maybe because they're desensitized to some of the perceived gruesome aspects of it by some of the television shows that we see, where we see slicing and dicing on the operating table on a daily basis from 9 at night through to 11.

The elderly are remarkably sensitive to the issue of organ donation—not as recipients. One of the remarkable things I learned is that age, in and of itself, isn't a factor in whether or not an organ can be useful. A 70-year-old or an 80-year-old is as capable of being an organ donor as an 18-year-old. But I talk to seniors about this—I go

into long-term-care facilities—and if it has been during a period of time when the counter-proposal has received a lot of publicity, they say, “Darn right, people should use my organs.” These are people who are very fatalistic, of course. They're not in denial. They know that they're reaching the end of their lives. And as you know, most seniors really aren't that fearful of it, are they? Most seniors are grateful for having had the opportunity to live full lives, the ones who have been, and to have made the contribution they've made. So they're incredibly candid and far more open about this discussion.

As I say, the organ donor card—and I've signed many of them; you lose them, you throw them away, they wear out and they crumble—reflects the mindset of, well, gosh, I suppose almost 50 years ago now, when an organ transplant was an exceptional thing, when it was miraculous, when it was the rarity, especially the successful one, rather than the norm. I resent the language that's used, because the people who want to market that style of organ donation call it “informed consent.” In other words, you had to indicate clearly that you wanted your organs to be used before a medical team could use them after death in an organ transplant or the utilization of tissue. That may well have represented or reflected the values of the time, especially when people were in awe of this exceptional and rare event. But, you see, I really believe that most Ontarians expect their organs to be used, because this informed consent regime is really a presumed denial, isn't it? You are presumed by the law to not want your organs to be used to save a life. That's the legal presumption. It's presumed denial, as if somehow they were the majority of people. That's the default position: denial. In other words, the default position in Ontario, as it is in Canada, is “No, you can't use my organs when I die.” I welcome the e-mails on this one. I don't know which selfish, miserable, self-centred, uncaring person would adopt that position.

There's no faith system that prevents, precludes or denies you access to God and heaven if you donate an organ after you're dead—none. The Jewish faith, which requires the body, as I understand it, to be buried intact—and that's why we see those tragic scenes when there's a terrorist act against Israelis: In the tragedy of a body bombed, a family has to try to gather all the pieces, because the body has to be buried as intact as possible. But the Jewish faith, and this comes from rabbinical sources, exempts people who have donated an organ after death, because that's a gift of life and the gift of life supersedes everything. There isn't a single faith system that prevents access to the Pearly Gates to people who have donated an organ. In fact, as George Marcello has often said, “God wants your soul, not your organs.”

That's why I say: What mean-spirited person would not want their organs to be used? People are going to e-mail me. People are going to say, “How dare you?” Well, I dare. Come on, e-mail me. I dare you to explain why you wouldn't want your organs to be used. “Well, I don't like the thought of it.” Too bad, so sad. The thought of it—there are no thoughts or feelings and no sensation.

You're going to be dead. The plug will have been pulled. "I don't want the state telling me what to do with my organs." Well, the state isn't. Right now, the state is telling you that your organs have to be burned or buried in the event of your death unless you sign a card. If this presumed consent style or system that I'm talking about doesn't prevent people from being mean-spirited and selfish, just stand up and say so. In other words, if you're that concerned about a life being saved with one of your organs or with some of your body tissue after your death, if you're that mean-spirited, be prepared to say so. Don't expect to hide behind the state.

If that one point in our history, the default position—based on, again, the recognition of organ transplant as a miraculous sort of event that was so rare—was presumed denial, I say surely the default position now is presumed consent. It's not informed consent; it's presumed denial. And again, presumed consent doesn't tell anybody that their organs can't be buried or burned with them, but if you want that to happen you've got to say so.

Why should the vast majority of Ontarians risk being denied their wishes because of the absence of an organ donor card at a particular point in time? George Marcello got me thinking about this because I knew I had to speak at this event at Notre Dame in the auditorium. I actually reflected for the first time on the system as it exists. George Marcello was touring Canada, and there he was in Welland. Now he's a two-time liver recipient. He had only had his first transplant when he was doing that tour. I actually had to reflect on the fact that hey, why is this presumed denial still the default position? Again, I and some of my colleagues in my caucus were alarmed because there was press coverage of it. There I went declaring myself for presumed consent. I said, "Why don't we have a system where we make it easier for medical teams to salvage organs by a system of presumed consent?"

0940

I've got to tell you, it's not NDP policy. It has never been the subject matter of a resolution at convention or council, and we were certainly too busy this last week-end. We shouldn't have been, but we were. Of course we were. It wasn't on the resolutions to be debated. But I'll tell you this. I acknowledge that the first time I introduced that presumed consent bill here in the Legislature as a New Democrat and did the lineup of radio talk shows and all that stuff—you know what flows from that—I agree that I was in the company of a minority of Ontarians. There was only a minority of Ontarians—a large minority, but clearly a minority; no two ways about it. But the most recent polling suggests that now more than 50% of Ontarians support a presumed consent model. There has been, over the course of the last four or five years, some significant shift.

I believe it's all because radio talk show hosts and their ilk were prepared to use this as subject matter on their programs. I was fortunate because most of the radio talk show hosts—Roy Green was one of them. Roy Green has moved to outside of Montreal now—one of

Canada's great broadcasters; he still broadcasts a show out of Montreal that's syndicated. Roy Green supported my proposition. So we had people like this who are influential with their listeners. Oh, I got the phone calls—oh boy, some really angry ones: "By God, Kormos, you socialist, you want my body, too?" First I was trying to be—finally I said, "Look, you know what?" Here's provocative statement number two: "You bet your boots I want your organs. Of course I want your organs. There, I've said it. And furthermore, I expect you to give them." So that's to the people who say, "Oh, Kormos wants my organs." Yes, I do.

I'm blessed; I don't need one at the moment. Like I told you a week or two weeks ago, when I die, I've got a '94 Chev pickup that's got a lot of miles on it. It's probably been better maintained than my organs, but it's down there on Bald Street. I've got the '94 Chevy pickup and I've got my organs. You can come and get either or all of the organs plus the pickup truck, because I'll have no need for any of them, will I? I'll have no need for any of them—no need. These organs are but dead weight for the pallbearers once you're dead. All these organs do is create extra work for the mortician: He's got more to take out. You think those organs don't get tinkered with when you're on that mortician's table and they're wrapping you up ready for the wake?

Furthermore, we already have presumed consent here in the province of Ontario; that's been long-standing. The Solicitor General of this province has been salvaging organs for a good chunk of time. You didn't know that, did you? The Solicitor General knows all about it: section 29 of the Coroners Act. We've had presumed consent in this province for a long, long time. "Any person performing a post mortem examination of a body under the warrant of a coroner may extract the pituitary gland and cause it to be delivered to any person or agency designated by the Chief Coroner for use in the treatment of persons having a growth hormone deficiency." Of course, the qualifying subsection 29(2) says, "This section applies where the coroner or person performing the post mortem examination has no reason to believe that the deceased has expressed an objection to his or her body being so dealt with after death." That's the model right there, existing in Ontario law.

Those of you who are squeamish about presumed consent should understand that should you have been or should you be the subject matter of a post-mortem pursuant to a coroner's warrant, they're going to take your pituitary gland. You didn't even have an advertising campaign to tell you about your right to opt out, did you? Most Ontarians have never heard of that provision in the Coroners Act, and if I remember correctly it's not a provision that's being deleted by the amendments that are going to committee this Thursday. So I guess presumed consent isn't such a novel proposition after all.

George Marcello and I have since, like he has with many of you, spent a fair amount of time together. He's had occasion to come here to Queen's Park frequently, and he's had occasion to cross the country at least one

more time. Before his last crossing of the country—2008 was his last criss-cross, after his second liver transplant—he had toured Europe very enthusiastically. I was eager, because George had talked to me about, and I had begun to read about—and I've got to tell you: Lorraine Luski, who's a research officer in the research and information services in our legislative library, has, since back in 2003 and 2004, been collecting and preparing material for me on different organ donor regimes and systems and has been following the news clippings and shifts and trends, including the movement in Britain to implement presumed consent—Britain's finally trying to get itself in sync with the rest of Europe—and Israel, one of the first countries in the world to implement a presumed-consent system. Once again, I reflect on the fact that Israel is a Jewish state. Notwithstanding their faith and beliefs about the disposal of a body after death, they were one of the first countries in the world to implement a presumed-consent regime.

George Marcello went and saw the Pope and was in Europe when he was researching these various European countries that have presumed consent, collecting data, and sadly became aware of a need once again—his liver was failing again. He finally got himself a liver for the second time, and he's alive and well now. Sadly, George's campaigns, his passion about organ donor awareness and his support for presumed consent have made him literally mortgage his house to finance these tours. But he has travelled all around, east to west, up into the Northwest Territories, to some really, really remote places, and young people especially are incredibly responsive to him. They like him. He cajoles them; he charms them. He's very effective.

Because there has been a fair amount of attention paid by any number of members from all three parties, reflecting their interest in increasing the availability of organs, and again with the help of Lorraine Luski and her hard work, I want to, perhaps, canvass some of the different styles that have been proposed. Of course, there are those who want to maintain the status quo—called informed consent; I insist it should be called presumed denial—because that's the status quo. That means there has to be the explicit consent of the donor. That's either through a donor registration card—although we were making headway in that regard, in terms of hospitals networking, especially larger hospitals. The need for a Canadian donor registry that's up to date and easily accessible is imperative, and, of course, one would hope, the need to harmonize organ donor laws across the country from province to province. That's informed consent, the status quo, or presumed denial.

Presumed consent: You have every right to say no—every right—but you have to say “No.” We know that most Ontarians say yes. That's the default position. The default position should reflect the majority of the population, shouldn't it? It seems only reasonable.

We want to avoid a market approach—and this goes back to this legislation. If we don't have a system of subsidizing workers who leave their jobs for that period of

time to do the medical procedure of recovery for an organ donation, we then enter, in an oblique way, the world of commodification, and that is turning organs into a commodity, where there will be people on organ donor waiting lists who have the means offering to pay the salary of someone who is prepared to give a piece of liver or a kidney. That's something that I think all of us would want to avoid absolutely. Organs should never be for sale, either directly or, as I say, indirectly. We create a climate for that indirect marketing of organs when we don't provide income replacement for the person going through the organ donor process as a living donor. That's why I say that this bill needs the second shoe to drop, and that's some sort of income displacement.

0950

In terms of elections, Mr. Klees had a bill before the House that was a very enlightened one, although I disagreed with it in terms of its effectiveness, and that was the required request, the mandatory election. Mind you, he softened it up a little bit, because in pure required-request systems, you either say yes or no. As has been pointed out by American research, required request has sometimes dramatically reduced the number of organs available, especially if it's tied into, let's say, a driver's licence application or renewal. They point out that the worst place to ask somebody to make that election, yes or no—and it's a mandatory election—is after they've waited an hour in a lineup during their lunch hour, being late getting back to work. By then they're grumpy and miserable. Most people, if they haven't thought about it before, if it's a novel proposition—and for younger people, that's not the case; they're well-educated, far better educated about organ donation than people my age are—their first response is, “Oh, at least I've got to think about it,” and then they say no. So the American phenomenon—because it's in the United States that they have some of these required request or mandatory elections; it's required because—I'll get into it in a second. Mandatory election has reduced the number of organs because their immediate response, if they're undecided, is to say no. Frank Klees lightened it up, softened it up by saying, “Maybe,” or “I'll think about it later; I'm not sure,” or “None of the above.” That's far too easy; that's all too easy a cop-out.

The required request has been incorporated even into our existing law, and that is to say that a person who explicitly says, “You take my organs, please,” can have their viewpoint, their wishes, countermanded by family members. That's the problem with asking family members one way or the other upon death. Family members are grieving. If the death was a result of some sort of trauma where there has been trauma to the body, they're faced with the sight of a body that has been mangled and banged up, and the prospect of somebody cutting that person open and doing yet more to the body is just repugnant to them. That's why I believe that the election—and in my proposal, the election would be by the person who doesn't want their organs used—can't be countermanded, and why I certainly wish that the existing legislation was,

at the very least, changed to ensure that the choice to give an organ can't be countermanded by a family member. If we have to live with that very restrictive presumed denial, surely a very specific, "I choose to have my organs utilized"—surely we should be respecting that wish. But in the status quo, even that wish can be countermanded.

Most of Europe, Israel, Britain, are now debating the matter of presumed consent. Does it increase the supply of organs? Well, instinctively I say yes, because it means that there are no legal barriers. I would propose that a presumed-consent system would allow people who are niggardly and mean-spirited about their organs to say so and for them to be on a registry, and that a medical team that wanted to salvage some organs of a person who is going to be dead in order to save another life would simply have to access that website with some reasonable level of identifying information to determine that that person wasn't on the list, and if that person wasn't on the list, then that's all that has to be done.

I've had little television and radio debates with medical ethicists about how, if you have presumed consent, maybe doctors will be quicker to pull the plug. Well, if the doctor knows that you have an organ donor card in your pocket, the same argument would apply, right? "Kormos has an organ card"—well, mind you, with some doctors it wouldn't even take an organ card. Assuming they didn't know who I was and held no ill will towards me in and of itself, "Hey, this guy's got an organ donor card and my buddy Dr. Bartolucci has a patient who's eagerly awaiting the kind of heart that I think—so don't look now; I'm going to pull the plug." What a stupid proposition. Because if that were true, doctors would be doing it now in the case of patients who they knew had an organ donor card. As a matter of fact, some of the presumed-consent regimes—Spain's, I believe, included—require that the medical team tending to the person at the time of their death not be the transplant team, so that there's a disconnect between the two. And of course you have anonymity around organ donation. Living donation is entirely different, but when you're accessing a pool of organ donation, you want anonymity.

The other interesting observation—oh, yes, how could I not have spoken about this sooner? Consider this observation: Organ donation isn't just about giving; it's about getting. How dare anyone expect to ever get an organ, should they need one, if they are not prepared to give one when it's of no use to them whatsoever? Indeed, I think it's Austria that highlights this by saying, "If you happen to have opted out, if you happen to have signed a card saying, 'I don't want my organs to be used to save a life,' don't expect to be at the front of the line when your kidneys fail. Don't expect to be at the front of the line when you need a heart replacement. Don't expect to be at the front of the line when you've got some corneas that have to be replaced, because you weren't prepared to be at the front of the line—you weren't even prepared to be in the line—when it came to saving somebody else's eyesight or somebody else's life."

I quite like that. I fancy that myself. Even in the Klees mandatory choice, I had fantasies of people lined up at

their driver's licence counter, and if they signed the "Yes, use my organs" box, fine, but if they signed the "No, do not use," there should be red lights flashing, there should be a spotlight, there should be a voice over a loudspeaker saying, "This person doesn't want to save a life when she or he dies and no longer has any use for their own organs." I really believe that. We should make those people have special licence plates on their cars so that everybody knows how selfish they are.

I put it this way as well: I'm sure it's just like where you live, but down in my neighbourhood in Welland, if somebody buys a new washing machine, let's say, and the old washing machine is still working but you wanted a front-loader instead of a top-loader, people expect you to put that out on the boulevard, saying, "Still working; it's yours," rather than carting it down to the city dump—unless it's totally broken down and of no value, of course. And in our neighbourhood, if we ever saw somebody doing that, we'd be gossiping about him or her, saying, "What's the matter with that old coot? He could have taken it over to the Sally Ann or St. Vincent de Paul or to the Open Arms Mission." They've got a store on Crowland Avenue now, where they sell new and reused stuff at low cost. "What a miserable SOB. He took that perfectly good chair, that didn't quite match his or her decor anymore, and broke it up so it would be easier to throw in the trash bin." We would be gossiping about that person for months and years, and that person wouldn't be welcome for that beer on our patio, or the rye and cola or, who knows—the mojito. We're all big on mojitos, because we all like going to Cuba down in my neighbourhood. That person wouldn't be welcome at all, on our patio, for a mojito in the hot summer months. I say the same thing about organ transplants. You would stigmatize somebody who is so mean-spirited as to smash something up rather than let somebody else take it where they could use it, be it a kitchen table, a coffee table, an armchair or a washing machine. I know you would, and I know you would go out of your way to make sure it got delivered to the Sally Ann, or to a mission that works with immigrant families and very poor families and families that have lost their incomes. Why should our attitude toward organs be any different? They're only organs. We eat them every day: kidney and liver. In my culture we eat heart, we eat lungs, we eat tripe—they're muscle tissue—and organ tissue. Organ tissue is really different than the heart muscle tissue; but organs, liver—some kind of tissue. People who cook their family dinners handle them all the time. They're only organs, and they have no value whatsoever upon the deceased's death. The person has no need for them. In fact, giving them isn't a gift. As I say, a gift is when you give something that costs you money. It's not a gift at all. It's just the decent thing to have happen in a civilized society.

1000

Let's take a look at some of the research and data about whether or not presumed consent has increased the availability of organs and shortened the waiting list: 1,700 people a year here in the province of Ontario alone,

and over 2,000, I'm told, across the country die while good organs are being burned and buried. People on the waiting list—I've met some of them—carry beepers and pagers because they have to make themselves available quickly as the whole process has to happen in a very short time frame. Every morning you wake up, praying to your God that today will be the day that that pager or beeper goes off, letting you know that an organ is available. You go to bed that night saying, "Well, maybe tomorrow," and you wake up the next morning saying, "Well, maybe today." Then you get sicker and sicker as your liver is failing you, and you're in the hospital, and your pallor is changing to yellow and the eyeballs are turning yellow, and you're getting weaker, and you still hope that maybe today—and then you die. On the very day that you die, good organs were burned or buried right here in the province of Ontario. And just maybe amongst them was one heart, one piece of liver or one kidney that could have been used to save your life. It's not just about giving; it's about getting.

I want to praise the Royal Canadian Legion, especially Branch 226, because Diane Doyle, the branch secretary, has made sure that the branch Royal Canadian Legion membership cards contain on their very back an organ donor card. I've got to confess I would be more likely to keep my Legion card with me. You never know where you're going to be in Ontario or Canada and you maybe want to drop in for a reasonably priced beer. I'm just so pleased that Ted Arnott, the member for Wellington-Halton Hills, who has been here for quite a while now—he's the Deputy Speaker, as a matter of fact—has got his union—sorry; slip of the tongue. But Ted would belong to a union too if he were in a unionized workplace. He'd probably be a radical unionist. He'd be running for shop chair. He'd be filing all the grievances. Ted Arnott is a member of Royal Canadian Legion Branch 226, and his membership card has the election filled out on the back. So I suspect that Ted Arnott has educated himself around organ donor issues. He's one of the vast majority of Ontarians who want their organs to be used.

I like Ted. I respect him. I admire him. I've been a fan of his from the get-go here, when he was much younger, and I don't wish him any ill will. But should he be the victim, God forbid, of a drunk driver, and there comes a point in time when he's going to expire, I don't want the medical team, because the wallet fell onto the roadside when the paramedics pulled him out of a car, to be frustrated by that and not ensure that Ted Arnott's wishes, like all fair-minded Ontarians or Canadians, are abided by. I don't want that to happen to you, Ted, for another—I don't want it ever to happen to you, and I hope you don't need this organ donor card for at least 50 more years. But we're all there. Come on, that's how it happens. That's the nature of life.

So Ted Arnott, the MPP from Wellington-Halton Hills, is part of that vast majority of Ontarians that expect their organs to be used to save a life upon their death. But he's got to have that card, you see, and that card's got to be available to the medical team. If, for any number of

reasons—wrong wallet, different wallet, the card gets tattered and torn—that card isn't available to the medical team, they've got some problems, and somebody dies as a result of that, maybe a 12- or 13-year-old kid.

There's nothing wrong, I suppose, with dying when you're 90 or even 88, because by then you've lived a full and, hopefully, gratifying life. But there's something very wrong about dying when you're 12 or 13, about a kid not ever having a chance to fulfill his or her potential, isn't there, Speaker? There's something very wrong about that, especially when we know that there are organs out there to be used as donations. But the system frustrates the exercise rather than assisting it.

Let's look at presumed consent jurisdictions. Again, I told you of Lorraine Luski, and her research has been most valuable in this regard. In 2004, there was a study called *The Impact of Presumed Consent Legislation on Cadaveric Organ Donation*—that's dead donors. Presumed consent has positively affected organ donation rates in countries that have adopted it. This study examined 22 countries over a 10-year period. The authors concluded that countries with presumed consent legislation have higher organ donation rates; in other words, more organs are available. And all the presumed consent jurisdictions allow people to say no.

Another study was done in Belgium in two districts, Antwerp and Leuven. In 1986, Leuven adopted a new presumed consent law, while Antwerp did not. Leuven's organ donation rate rose from 15 to 40 donors per year after a three-year period. It darn near tripled. In other words, presumed consent almost tripled the amount of organs available, and people still had the right to say no for whatever wacky, wild, bizarre, selfish reason.

Denmark enacted presumed consent legislation in 1967. It's reported that Denmark had one of the highest organ donation rates in Europe until 1986, when its presumed consent law was changed to a presumed denial system like we have here in the province of Ontario. Afterwards, the country's donation rate fell by half. In other words, abandoning presumed consent decreased by 50% the number of organs available. And when you decrease the number of organs available, you decrease by the same number the number of people whose lives are going to be saved, including kids.

Today, Denmark's donation rate for cadaveric organs is just about the same as Canada's. The general conclusion is that presumed consent systems, which retain the right of people to say no, significantly increase the number of organs available for transplant.

1010

A *Journal of Medical Ethics* article of June 2003, authors V. English and A. Sommerville—and I'll quote from it, please, if I may: "These data, and a general tendency for countries with presumed consent to have higher donation rates, lead us to believe that provided it is accepted by the public and health professionals, presumed consent would lead to an increase in donations." Put an ellipsis between that last sentence and this one. I'm going to move along so I don't use up a whole

lot of time. "Debate about whether presumed consent or developing the infrastructure is the most effective method might be an interesting academic debate, but is futile when the option of developing the infrastructure within which a presumed consent system is operated seems to be the obvious way forward."

The perception is incredibly important. "The perception that presumed consent will increase donation rates is not merely based on the mechanics of the system but also on the impact such a change will have on public opinion. Presumed consent represents a positive endorsement of organ donation as a good thing to do, and with this formal acceptance will come a time when donation will come to be seen as the norm rather than the exception."

In my inarticulate way, that's what I've been trying to say; that's what I've been trying to tell you. We've got to make organ donation and saving organs from the bodies of dead people the norm rather than the exception. We've got to build a culture where we care enough about each other, where we don't have to just rely upon our family members to share a piece of liver—and I'm not sure mine is the one to go for—where we don't have to just rely upon family members, but where we share a piece of liver as readily as we share our blood.

People go to blood clinics. It's painless. They give you apple juice and stuff and cookies afterwards. But they give their whatever it is, a pint; it's not very much in the total scheme of things. That's the norm. Nobody expects to be applauded. Nobody expects to get rewarded. Nobody expects to be on the front page of the newspaper. And we do it for strangers. We do it for people we'll never meet. Heck when I give blood, I don't know if it's going to go to a Liberal or a Tory. Gosh, we don't care, because it's not the point. It could go to somebody whom I despise, but that's not the point. I want to see the culture around organ donation become as broad and general.

We've already seen a major shift in public perception on the issue. Those countries in Europe that have adopted it, countries like Spain, Italy, Austria, and some very conservative cultures—people who, when I tell them about Ontario and Canada, they think how backwoods-y that is. They think it's bizarre; they find it outright peculiar. Why would you make people jump through legal hoops to make sure that their organs are used after their death?

As I say, I think presumed consent would—as this article concludes, "donation will come to be seen as the norm rather than the exception." Presumed consent will also increase the number of living donors. Because as we shift perception, if there is an ad in the paper saying, "We need a piece of liver for somebody who's this blood type," we'll be more than willing to say, "Hey, I'm that blood type, and maybe I can help." That is the Canadian way of doing things; that's the Canadian perspective. We help people. We help our neighbours. We help our neighbours even if we don't know them, even when they live on the other side of the globe. We help our neighbours regardless of their religious beliefs, political attitudes, regardless of whether they are cranky old guys or generous, hospitable people.

We help kids who are dying. We help children who endure months and years of waiting, who are confronted with their fatality and with the reality of death at an age far sooner than it should be. Come on: Kids shouldn't have to worry about dying. Kids should have to worry about where the next baseball or hockey game is or where the next school dance is going to be. Kids shouldn't have to worry about dying, yet our refusal, our stubbornness about updating and modernizing our organ donor laws, is forcing kids to live with that fear and forcing them into their deathbeds.

I hope that folks would give presumed consent a second thought. I look forward to passing this legislation, I suspect, as I say, on its next calling after Ms. DiNovo or perhaps some others speak to it. I look forward to being in committee with the legislation, look forward to the third reading, and I look forward to reintroducing the bill that the New Democrats and I have introduced from time to time now creating a presumed consent regime here in the province of Ontario.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): This House stands in recess now until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1017 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I look forward to having the staff and students of Norman G. Powers Public School, who should be arriving very shortly, enjoy question period, and I would hope all would enjoy the pleasure as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and page Reed Bell, we'd like to welcome his mother, Paula Bell, who will be sitting in the west members' gallery today.

On behalf of the member from Etobicoke North and page Nancy Kanwal, we'd like to welcome her mom, Kuldeep Kanwal; her father, Satwinder Kanwal; her brother, Gundeep Kanwal; her grandmother, Harbans Kanwal; and her grandfather, Parduman Kanwal, who will be here in the east members' gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

There being no further introductions, it is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PENSION FUNDS

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Minister of Finance: Minister, Quebec's largest pension fund, the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, recently reported losses of nearly \$40 billion in 2008. This has certainly consumed debate in the National Assembly, where members are wondering how they could lose so much and why nobody knew.

Can the minister update the assembly on the status of public pensions here in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Like all pension plans and defined benefit plans, all eight of the ones that we are either sponsors or members of have experienced loss as a result of world market conditions. FSCO has those results available to the members and others for the most up-to-date period.

I would remind the member as well that we tabled a report from Harry Arthurs with respect to defined benefit pension plans. There are 142 recommendations in that. Prior to Christmas, we eased a number of the requirements for repaying with respect to that as well, moving to a 10-year solvency rule instead of five.

None of our public pensions are anywhere near the condition that the Caisse de dépôt is in. Despite the enormous challenges, I'm satisfied that those pensions are—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Retired civil servants and taxpayers are rightly concerned about the shortfall in the public pension funds given the state of the markets and what has happened in Quebec. The OMERS plan recently announced it lost \$8 billion on its investments last year. The teachers' pension plan of \$108 billion is one of the world's largest pension funds. To the Minister of Finance: In your upcoming budget, will you table the status of these major public plans and your plan in the McGuinty government to do something about it?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I will remind the member that those fund members get annual reports and quarterly reports, as I understand it, from the pensions themselves. They are subject to regulation by FSCO. The member is right: Clearly, as a sponsor of those plans, there are fiscal implications to the government resulting from it that will be adequately displayed both in the budget and in public accounts.

I want to assure those members of the plan that those pensions, in spite of those losses—and they're large losses, but relative to their asset base, I say to the member, are not nearly the situation you find with the Caisse de dépôt. We have improved the reporting requirements of FSCO and will continue to work with the pensions that we sponsor, as well as with the members, as we did in December when we announced those relief measures, to help ensure the viability of those pensions going forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I think the minister knows that the problem with Caisse in Quebec was that nobody found out until \$40 billion was gone, and that's why we are asking you to table in your budget an update on Ontario's public pension plans.

You referenced Professor Harry Arthurs, who warned last month that Ontario could be one major bankruptcy away from a shipwreck scenario that would cripple the pension benefits guarantee fund. Robert Brown, professor of actuarial science at the University of Waterloo,

estimates that a dozen corporate pension plans may soon have to tap into the guarantee fund to escape bankruptcy. Your own documents say that that guarantee fund is currently \$100 million in the red.

Minister, what is your plan to ensure that folks not only won't lose their jobs, but also their pensions?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'll just again remind the member of the steps we took: the extension of the solvency amortization period from five to 10 years with the consent of active members—your party did not support, when you were in government, the consent of active members—or their collective bargaining agency; consolidation of previous funding schedules; deferral of catch-up payments; enhanced notice to members; and temporary limitations going forward. We also, in my budget last year, put additional resources to FSCO to help improve its ability to oversee and report, and that member voted against that money, as did his party.

It's unfortunate that they're just now understanding what this means for working people, working men and women. You've spent the last 10 years criticizing our public servants. This government stood behind them in those days; this government stands behind them as the pension plans are affected, like other pension plans, but remain—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

New question? The member from Kitchener-Waterloo.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Education, and we don't have notice that she's going to be away.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Government House Leader, will the Minister of Education—

Interjection.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I understand that the Minister of Education should be here within five minutes, and I apologize for the delay.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Would you like to stand down your question?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I will stand down my question.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Okay. New question.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. It's a well-known fact that Ontario has now lost more than 300,000 manufacturing jobs under the McGuinty government's watch. Just today, 21 at Hiram Walker in Windsor; 130 at Essar Steel in Sault Ste. Marie; and 30 at Emerson Climate Technologies in Brantford. Real people had these jobs—a mother or father with kids to feed; a young person just starting out. These people don't have huge expectations from their government, but they do expect a government that will be

there for them in their moment of need. When will this government finally be there for them?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The job loss situation that is buffeting Ontario today is buffeting all of North America and Europe. There are job losses in places like Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Manitoba—your predecessor liked to cite Manitoba as an example. Manitoba has now lost, as a percentage, more manufacturing jobs than Ontario.

We have undertaken, through a number of initiatives in previous budgets, and we'll build on those initiatives, in the areas of infrastructure to get shovels in the ground and construction under way—more than 100,000 people today. Training and education: Our training initiatives are now serving tens of thousands of those workers who have been displaced. A number of our initiatives to municipalities have helped them cope with the situation we face today.

There is no doubt that huge numbers of people have lost their jobs. We will continue to build on what we've done already to help those—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The finance minister should know that I'm talking about Ontario. That's this government's responsibility: Ontarians. With an answer like that, it's no wonder that nearly two thirds of Ontarians lack confidence in this government's ability to get us through these tough times. They're among the Ontarians who have seen their jobs vanish, and for so many, that vanishing job means that their dreams and their aspirations are vanishing as well.

In the face of what's happening in Ontario today, how can this minister stand there and still claim that his government has a plan?

1040

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I think the people of Ontario recognize that what we're experiencing is part of a global situation, and as much as the member opposite may try to portray this as having happened only here in Ontario, the people get it. They understand that. They understand the job loss, and they respect the fact that we invested \$7 billion in infrastructure, and that member voted against it. They respect the fact that we have invested in communities—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Member for Hamilton East.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: —to the tune of billions of dollars, and that member and her party voted against it.

We will be bringing in a budget on March 26 that will build on the initiatives we've taken to protect individuals, families and communities.

Mr. Paul Miller: Total baloney.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: That member and her party know full well the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The honourable member from Hamilton East will withdraw the comment that he just made.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Withdraw the comment.

Mr. Paul Miller: Okay, I withdraw "baloney."

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member will withdraw the comment.

Mr. Paul Miller: I withdraw the comment.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's this minister who clearly doesn't get it. Ontarians get it, though: three quarters of Ontarians say the government has no plan, and they're right. Some 80% of the women and men who call this province home think our economic prospects are poor because of this government's inaction; they are right. How many more families need to face economic hardship before this minister owns up to it?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I appreciate the leader of the third party wanting to support Ontario workers and Ontario businesses, but, you know, it's important to practise what you preach. I can't help but wonder about your party's commitment to Buy Ontario when I look at your leadership convention and ballot. They boasted about spending \$100,000 on a new system with the latest technologies. There are two Ontario companies that perform this. They chose a company in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. Their leadership ballots were counted in Dartmouth.

The people in Ontario see through you. They know we're in the midst of a global crisis. You shouldn't make light of that global crisis, and you should be consistent with what you say in here and what you do at your convention. This party, this government are the ones—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back again to the Acting Premier: When it comes to protecting the livelihood of Ontarians, the McGuinty government's invisible hand approach simply has not worked. For all his bluster, this minister knows it. The invisible-hand is there to shovel hundreds of millions of dollars out the door to multinational corporations. But where was the invisible hand to ensure that there were job and product guarantees attached to the money that was shovelled out the door?

Hon. George Smitherman: When we come to the supplementary, I'll ask the Minister of Finance to continue on this path, but I would like to just remind the honourable member that she had a one-minute opportunity there to answer a question that was just posed by the Minister of Finance related to a decision point in her responsibility. The honourable member stands and wishes to talk about Buy Ontario and a focus on domestic content and the like, but when their party had the opportunity to exercise its discretion over expenditure, they decided instead to support a company out-of-province when there were known companies here in the province

of Ontario with that skill set. So we understand it's a time of hardship for people in the province, but we do think that it would be good for the honourable member and for her party to demonstrate more active leadership on this point.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Again, I would ask the minister to focus on the questions I'm asking him. New Democrats have no problem with using taxpayers' money to assist companies and protect jobs in this province. We think that's an important thing to do. But it's not what this government has done. It has lined the pockets of fat-cat executives while hardworking women and men got the shaft. That's exactly what happened at Stelco, which received \$150 million in taxpayers' money—and what happened? Former CEO Rodney Mott walked away—walked away—with \$67 million in 2007. Last week, 2,100 women and men walked away with a pink slip.

Does this minister think that's the right thing to do?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: What I think was appropriate is that this government invested \$150 million to protect the pensions of Stelco workers. That member and her party set up the situation that led to Stelco getting into the position it did on its pension. To add insult to injury, the member for Hamilton East and the members of the NDP caucus voted against helping Stelco pensioners when we came up with the package two years ago.

These are difficult and challenging times. As the member herself said on March 3, Stelco workers are the "victims of a deepening global recession." She was right then. Where she was wrong was in voting against—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Look, this minister can hide behind the guise of protecting pensions, but the fact remains that taxpayers' money is going out the door without any strings attached. It's hard-working Ontarians who are paying the price—the same hard-working Ontarians who are willing to make sacrifices to keep their jobs. High-flying executives, on the other hand, should be held to the same standard, we believe.

New Democrats support limits on executive pay and perks, especially when taxpayers' money is on the line. When will this government finally demand that?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This government and this Premier moved to protect the pensioners at Stelco, and that member and her party voted against it. You shamelessly did not stand with the working people of Hamilton, with the Stelco pensioners. To stand here and criticize a government that invested to protect those pensions shows how much that party and its new leader don't understand the challenges in the world economy today.

The people of this province recognize that the issues are deep, and they require constant and improving response from all levels of government. Premier McGuinty and his government stepped in to protect the pensions of Stelco workers. Member Horwath and her party voted

against that initiative. Those are the facts, that's the reality, and history shows that that's reality.

SCHOOL CALENDAR

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Minister of Education. Minister, school boards across this province, as you know, are grappling with the 2009-10 school calendar, which is going to see students go back to school before Labour Day to meet the in-school instruction days. As you know, this has been created by your creation of Family Day. Isn't it ironic that this is going to create chaos for families when it comes to vacations, summer camps, hockey camps and student summer employment?

You have the power under subsection 11(1) of the act to amend the calendar and eliminate the uncertainty for students, parents and businesses. Will you do so?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I do apologize for being late to question period. I was visiting a school where we were hearing the great results of the Pathways to Education program: The graduation rates are up. With the support of Minister Smitherman many years ago, the Pathways program began in Regent Park, and it's a great news story.

I know the member opposite doesn't want to hear a success story. The question about the school calendar is one that I have answered before. Boards across the province are making their decisions in consultation with their communities. I will say to the member opposite that I have drafted a letter that is going to the directors of all the boards in the province to encourage them to consider the option of having professional activity days in the first week of September so that school can, in fact, start after Labour Day. Boards need to make those decisions in consultation with their communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

1050

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: If that was the case, why didn't you let them make a decision on Family Day? You uniformly as a government made that decision. I would say to you that parents are confused and it's hurting businesses. David Bednar, general manager of the CNE, which, as you know, is an iconic end-of-summer tradition, has written to say that this year it runs from August 21 to September 7, and he implores you not to bring students back to school before Labour Day because it would have a detrimental impact on the CNE and on the Ontario economy. He says that in these challenging economic times, students need the income they make from the fair and the province needs the economic stimulus that the CNE generates.

Will you use the power you have to create some uniformity and end the anxiety for families and businesses?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I understand the economic challenges that we are undergoing in this province. I understand also that the executive of the CNE has written to 39 boards. I've been in conversation with the Minister of Tourism. I'm very aware that people who are involved

in the tourism industry are in conversation with school boards about this issue.

The fact is, there has never been 100% uniformity across the province in terms of school starting dates. There are hunting seasons. There are local circumstances. There are boards that are next to Quebec, where the school starts earlier. There are individual community reasons for school starting dates to be staggered and to be different across the province. I am not, as the Minister of Education, going to take away the authority of school boards to make those local decisions. They need to be in conversation with their communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: The minister knows full well that those types of situations have not created postponement or early advancement of the school calendar.

You seem to forget, Minister, as do all of the people on your side of the House, that tourism is a \$22-billion industry in this province. It has already been battered, and you are prepared to put a further nail in its coffin. Last week, the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka shared letters with you from tourism operators in Ontario who are going to be adversely impacted. In fact, for something like Santa's Village, which only operates during the summer, it's going to mean one tenth of the revenue that they don't get. It could mean, actually, that some of them will not survive.

So I ask you today, are you and your government further prepared to jeopardize jobs and the economy, or will you actually take some action to make sure that students have summer jobs—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's extremely interesting that the member opposite didn't change the legislation in 1998 when this exact situation pertained. The fact is, I spoke to the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka. I made the suggestion that the tourism operators needed to be in contact with the school board.

I am very aware, which is, as I say, why I have drafted a letter to directors to encourage them to consider all of the options that would allow them to begin the school year for kids after Labour Day. The reality is that school boards need to have that autonomy because every situation is different. So what I will not do is tie the hands of individual school boards, who are aware of their community situations. I would encourage the member opposite and all of the members in the House to talk to their tourism operators to make sure that they are in conversation with their school boards so the school boards will make the best decisions for their communities.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: To the Minister of Education: Minister, two weeks ago we brought families of students who have suffered from the pain and humiliation of student-on-student violence and have had abuse in the

schools; they were here to encourage dialogue with you. A young girl, herself a victim of bullying, is raising awareness and fighting the good fight virtually on her own.

These people have not had any response or direction from your ministry or your office despite repeated attempts to contact you for support. Minister, your safe schools action report is just that: It is a report. When will you finally do your job, take action, and implement mandatory reporting in your schools for the sake of those who continue to be abused?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, I want to just express my sympathy to the family and to the student who has been involved in this incident. Obviously, it's extremely serious when kids or adults are the victims of bullying.

It is patently untrue that there has been no contact. Ministry officials have been in touch with both the parent and the board and continue to monitor the situation. I'm not going to say any more about the specifics of that situation, but I just want to be clear that the ministry has been involved; ministry officials in the regional office have been involved. I think it's extremely irresponsible for anyone in elected office to spread that kind of fear and misinformation. I really think it is—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I just remind the honourable member of a lecture that I delivered to all members last week, to try—

Mr. Frank Klees: The Speaker is standing—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Newmarket-Aurora is not helping either, with his comments.

I just remind all members that we do need to ensure that we treat one another with respect. Making comments that can cause the opposition to start to make some challenging comments back isn't helpful for the whole Legislature.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Fair enough, Mr. Speaker, but the point I'm trying to make is that in a situation like this—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I don't need the help from the member for Brant.

Supplementary?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: The truth of the matter is these parents have had absolutely no satisfaction from anything your ministry might or might not be doing. Your promises ring empty for these parents, Minister, and they've had to fight this fight on their own for several years to try to keep their kids safe in schools. You and your office have virtually abandoned them.

Our children deserve to feel safe in their schools and the police need to be alerted to serious incidents of violence and student-on-student abuse in the schools. This can no longer be kept like a dirty little secret in our schools. The police are trained to handle these situations and will ensure that students are protected and the abusers receive the help they need.

Minister, when will you take action to safeguard our students, who have been entrusted to your care, and mandate that the police and parents are contacted—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I've said many times in this House, we're going to be introducing legislation that will, in fact, close the gaps that we have uncovered as a result of the actions of the safe schools action team. That legislation will be introduced.

I have to make the point that when this government came into office, there were no anti-bullying programs in schools. The resources around diversity and equity had been removed from the schools. I started doing conflict resolution work in 1990. When this government opposite came into power, they took every resource out of the schools, and we are putting those resources back into the schools.

The member opposite has absolutely not a leg to stand on in terms of putting resources into the schools. Every school in this system has got an anti-bullying program in place. I will put our record on anti-bullying and safe schools up against the member opposite's record any day of the week.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Simcoe North will withdraw the comment.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I withdraw that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Minister of the Environment aren't helping the situation.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Right now, more than 100 seniors at the Elizabeth Centre long-term-care facility in Val Caron in my riding of Nickel Belt have been wheeled in to watch question period on TV. They want to hear the Minister of Health answer this question. The minister promised them 2,000 new nurses, 2,500 extra personal support workers and three extra minutes of care. The people want to know, when does the Minister of Health intend to keep his promise?

1100

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, we have already begun. I would quote to the people—and I say hello to the people who are watching from the long-term-care residence—Donna Rubin, the chief executive officer of the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors. She says, "I want to commend you and the McGuinty government for recently announcing the first round"—the first round, I would stress—"of funding allocation to support the addition of 873 personal support worker positions in Ontario's long-term-care homes.... This new funding will most certainly have a direct impact on daily care levels of residents.... We are pleased to see

that this new funding will be treated as an increase in the nursing and personal care envelope."

In fact, we are already working to build on the progress that we have made. For example, the member mentions that we have added 2,500 more personal support workers and 2,000 more nurses, and have already raised the level of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The good people at the Elizabeth Centre gave me 709 postcards, and the people of Parkdale-High Park have given my colleague 500 postcards, urging the government to make the numbers work and to follow through on the long-term-care promises made.

New Democrats support the campaign by the Ontario Long Term Care Association. We know that without adequate staffing, our seniors suffer. It is that simple. Will the Minister of Health ensure today that the government finally fulfills its promises in the upcoming budget: the promise of 9,000 nurses, 2,000 of them in long-term care; the promise of new PSWs; and the promise of increased minutes of care?

Hon. David Caplan: Our track record on this side of the House speaks for itself. I would contrast, for the people living at Elizabeth Centre who are watching today, the record of this member and her colleagues when they had the privilege to serve Ontarians. The NDP in fact cut 1,200 community service agencies for the elderly and disabled and replaced them with 150 multi-service agencies. It was an NDP government which hiked nursing home fees for 50,000 seniors by \$330 a month. It was the NDP who in fact in their last budget increased investment 0.1% in funding for long-term care. I would just contrast that with our last year's budget, which was 100 times that: a 10% increase in funding by this government and members on this side of the House who truly not only put their money where their mouth is but have their hearts in the right place when it comes to support for our seniors and support for the workers who are caring for them.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Simply put, when our young people have access to education, they will succeed, and we all benefit. As a former educator, I have seen first-hand the important role that education plays in developing a student's life. All too often, students get sidetracked and they lack the necessary support and encouragement to succeed. The Pathways to Education program is an excellent example of a focused effort to help more students stay in school and go on to college, university and apprenticeships. I see the success of the Pathways program in my riding of Kitchener-Conestoga in the Chandler-Mowat neighbourhood, led by Megan Conway, with over 87% enrolment. Through tutoring, mentoring and financial support,

Pathways to Education is supporting youth from economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods. How is the government supporting this invaluable program?

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to thank the member for her question and for her commitment to education and to Pathways. As the Minister of Education mentioned this morning, she, myself, the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, and I know with the best wishes of the Deputy Premier, joined the Premier at Sir Sanford Fleming high school here in Toronto to attend the release of the Pathways to Education program results.

As members may know, the Pathways program was started in Regent Park in 2001 by the Regent Park Community Health Centre. The aim of the project was to reduce poverty and its effects in the neighbourhood by lowering the high school dropout rate and increasing access to post-secondary education. In 2007, in partnership with the United Way of Greater Toronto, our government invested \$19 million in the Pathways program which helped to expand the program to new neighbourhoods in Toronto, Kitchener and Ottawa. Here are the results: After only a few years, the Pathways program in these communities has succeeded in reducing the number of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: The family counselling centre in Kitchener is working hard to provide opportunities for many students in the Pathways program. Students from the south-central core of Kitchener now have access to a variety of after-school programs which are helping them to graduate and become contributing members of society. But the Pathways program is only able to reach out to so many students and there are more students out there that need assistance. If we can demonstrate to students the benefit of pursuing higher education and training, we all benefit.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, what steps are being taken to ensure we are reaching out to students, not only in the Pathways program but to all students?

Hon. John Milloy: Just to finish the results on Pathways, through the Pathways program these communities have succeeded in reducing the number of academically at-risk youth by up to 52%. For example, eight years ago, more than half of Regent Park students dropped out of school. Today, 90% of students are staying in school. Pathways is part of the government strategy to encourage more people to pursue post-secondary education and training.

Our First Generation program is helping students become the first in their family to attend college or university or train to become an apprentice. It's through a \$27-million investment that we are supporting university, college and community-based initiatives to inform, advise and encourage more first-generation students to pursue further education. We also recently announced four new crown ward education championship teams in Toronto, London, Ottawa and Thunder Bay to help crown wards succeed and encourage—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: My question is to the Minister of Health. Minister, many of my constituents in Cambridge and North Dumfries are gravely concerned and unsettled by the persistent reports that your ministry has plans to downsize Cambridge Memorial Hospital from a full-scale community hospital to an urgent care centre. Will you assure the 135,000 residents of Cambridge and North Dumfries that there is no plan in the works by your ministry to downsize this strong and vibrant community hospital?

Hon. David Caplan: I certainly want to thank the member for the question. I know he's advocating on behalf of his community. There are in fact no plans by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to take the actions that the member described.

I can tell you that I know that the Waterloo Wellington Local Health Integration Network has been working with the hospital and will continue to do so in an effort to continue to provide the quality of care that residents would want, and achieve a balanced budget position. Cambridge Memorial Hospital and the Waterloo Wellington LHIN share the same goal: planning for the future and having a sustainable health care system for the residents of Cambridge. I support those actions and that collaborative effort. I am encouraged, and I encourage both sides to continue the local dialogue, a meaningful results-based planning approach, on behalf of the broader Cambridge community.

We're going to continue to support the LHIN and we're going to continue to support Cambridge Memorial Hospital as it moves forward to provide outstanding—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Durham will withdraw his comment, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: Minister, like 80% of the hospitals in this province, Cambridge Memorial Hospital is in a deficit position. As Premier McGuinty has asked the Canadian government for fair treatment for Ontarians in need of health care, I too am demanding fairness of health care funding for Cambridge and the region of Waterloo, where hospitals continue to be shortchanged.

Will you play fair by implementing immediately a population needs-based funding formula for hospitals as promised? The province has received \$900 million in extra health care dollars from the Canadian government, so this is an opportune moment to adopt the Premier's sentiment that fairness in funding is a perfect solution to meeting the health care needs of Ontario.

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member.

The facts that he presents in this House are not correct. The provincial government has not received \$900 million in federal funding, so that's simply incorrect. But I can

tell you that this member's advocacy would have been welcomed, because upon taking office back in 1995, this member and his colleagues cut funding for Cambridge Memorial Hospital some 5.5%. I want to contrast that to the support that members on this side of the House have for Cambridge Memorial Hospital. When Cambridge Memorial CEO Julia Dumanian says, "We put ourselves under the microscope all the time so we welcome the opportunity to work with this external team on creative ways to closing the gap between"—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

1110

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Ten thousand more people in Toronto alone have been forced onto social assistance in the past year. They have rent; they have mortgages; they have loans; they have children to feed. Local economies are suffering terribly. Families are going bankrupt, small businesses are going bankrupt, and cities are going to go bankrupt, too. Why won't this government assist families, communities and cities by making the necessary investments now during these bad economic times when they're needed the most?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, let me say this: I'm very sorry. These members on this side of the House are always sorry to see when people are losing their jobs and when people have to rely on social assistance or ODSP to keep themselves fed and housed on a daily basis. We're very sad.

This government takes its responsibility very seriously, and I think that we have shown this since we came into power by giving social assistance and ODSP a 9% increase—an increase almost every year but one. We will continue to do so, and we will continue to make sure that those who need our help get help in a timely manner, when they need it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: The minister says she is sorry and she is sad, but I haven't heard anything that she plans or that the government plans to do. The reality is, people are losing their jobs because the McGuinty government has failed to develop a jobs plan for this province. Thousands of Ontarians are being forced out of their homes and into shelters and food banks because the McGuinty government has failed to act. The reality is that cities will have financial shortfalls because the McGuinty government refuses to fully upload provincial programs like welfare until 2018.

My question: Will the McGuinty government end the download sooner than 2018 to provide relief that cities need now, or do families, small businesses and the poor face more suffering?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me just set the record straight. This government has been uploading from the city of Toronto and municipalities since we got into office in 2003. The very fact of the matter is that we signed an historic agreement with the city of Toronto and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario on October 31, which, in fact, does upload ODSP—Ontario disability support program—Ontario Works, court security and prisoner transportation.

In the city of Toronto, for instance, since 2003, we have uploaded costs totalling \$368 million, and in one-time funding and capital costs, \$496 million, for a total of \$865 million to the people and the city of Toronto. We're proud of that record, and we look forward to working with them as the uploads continue.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. We hear often in this House about how the government is working hard to form a new relationship with the aboriginal people in Ontario by moving forward and doing all that we can to ensure that aboriginal children and youth, Ontario's fastest-growing population, have a brighter future. We know that the hard work you are doing will lead to improved relationships and will help with the successful implementation of our policies and programs.

I know that one of the ministry's roles is to ensure that Ontario's priorities are in line with the unique needs of aboriginal people. This requires consulting with aboriginal communities and making sure that Ontario ministries work together on aboriginal policy and programs.

My question is, how is this government working with aboriginal communities to ensure that Ontario's justice system reflects the distinct culture among the First Nations, Metis and Inuit people of Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I thank the member for the question. The member is absolutely right. The McGuinty government has worked very hard to build a new relationship with First Nation and Metis communities across this province. We've moved from a relationship that may have been at an historic low when we took office to a relationship that is approaching an historic high when it comes to developing the mutual trust and respect that's needed in growing this very important relationship.

The government recognizes the need to respect aboriginal culture and history in everything we do, including within Ontario's justice system. We recognize that aboriginal people account for only 2% of Ontario's population but experience much higher incarceration rates. Our government's aboriginal justice strategy is making some real gains in addressing this as well as other challenges that aboriginal people face in the justice system.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I understand the importance attached to aboriginal community justice programs. These programs operate in aboriginal communities and

are delivered by aboriginal organizations. As we have just heard, the government clearly recognizes the importance of partnership with aboriginal communities to find culturally appropriate responses to deal with the aboriginal offenders and victims in the criminal justice system.

I understand that this government has just recently almost doubled its funding for aboriginal community justice programs. This investment supports aboriginal organizations to provide services in 23 communities across the province. I know my constituents in Ottawa Centre will be particularly interested in funding for a new aboriginal community justice program that will be delivered through the Odawa friendship centre in Ottawa.

Would the minister tell this House how that investment will help reduce crime and victimization among the First Nations, Metis and Inuit people in Ottawa?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'll refer this to the Attorney General.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Aboriginal community justice programs are enormously important. They are a creative and better way of having offenders with relatively minor offences held accountable but in a way that will ensure they don't repeat their criminal activity and that they're plugged back into the community in a positive way. The federal and provincial governments have doubled our funding for these programs.

Just a few months ago, we were with the member for Ottawa Centre, who is a very strong advocate for these programs and for Odawa friendship centre. We announced a \$115,000 aboriginal community justice program for that centre, a program that will ensure pre- and post-charge diversion, a program that will improve outcomes for the offenders, for the communities and for aboriginal justice generally.

PROVINCIAL PURCHASING POLICY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a question for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Minister, as part of its License to Win contest, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. is giving away 22 cars at Ontario casinos in April. As a provincial agency under your guidance, you would think the OLG would be sensitive to the problems that we face in the automotive sector, but the 22 prize cars are imported Mercedes-Benzes, high-priced European cars made by foreign workers.

Minister, do you think this sends an appropriate message? Why would the government not purchase Ontario-made cars for their lottery giveaway?

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to say that I agree entirely with the question the honourable member has posed. It was for this very reason that this morning I had a face-to-face meeting with the president of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., Ms. Kelly MacDougald. I told her in no uncertain terms that the purchase of those vehicles represents very bad judgment on the part of that organization. I want to say to the honourable member that I would be very pleased to see the legislative committee continue to hold the Ontario Lottery and Gaming

Corp. to appropriate levels of accountability. This organization has made a bad misjudgment, particularly in the face of the economic circumstances facing Ontarians and facing autoworkers in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Thank you for that answer, Minister. Words come late.

You know, I'm a Conservative, but I've got to say that the CAW has done more for the automotive industry than the McGuinty government. How do the good workers in Windsor, Oshawa, Chatham, Ingersoll, Oakville, Milton—all the automotive-industry towns in Ontario—feel about this government buying fancy new cars that are made in Europe? It's simply a highlight of the lack of sensitivity that this government has toward the Ontario economy and how they communicate that through their ministries and responsibilities. You refused to acknowledge the problem of the automotive sector for five full years, and now the industry is in serious jeopardy. Minister, is it too much to ask that your government continue to appear to be concerned? Everyone is doing their part to save the auto industry. When will the McGuinty government start—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

1120

Hon. George Smitherman: I say again to the honourable member that the decision taken by this agency of the government was a bad decision. They entered into a contract, as is the opportunity and obligation that they have. But for the honourable member to try to bridge that issue to this ridiculous assertion that there's been no support from our government's standpoint, when he has previously stood in his place and opposed the support that we offered as we sought to make sure that we were making investments in the automotive sector in the province of Ontario that could be efficient and competitive going forward? We will continue to stand with the CAW, with the men and women who proudly build vehicles in this province of Ontario, and seek to work with them to ensure that, going forward, we have a strong presence of the automotive sector in the economy of the province of Ontario.

CORONER'S INQUEST

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels.

A coroner's jury is visiting the northern community of Kashechewan, where James Goodwin and Ricardo Wesley died while in police custody, resulting in the inquest. Will the minister guarantee that the coroner's jury visits not only the police detachment but the water treatment plant, the levee, the band office, the school, the health centre and community homes?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Obviously, the member should know—I'm sure she does know, but she wouldn't want to admit—that we politicians from any party don't guide the coroner in his holding of a coroner's inquest. She

knows that full well, and for her to stand here and try to ensure that, through some publicity stunt, she's going to get me to commit to do something that would be totally improper is just never, ever going to happen. She may want to do it. I won't.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was the Deputy Grand Chief of Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Alvin Fiddler, who said that seeing the physical condition of the other community installations is necessary during the visit to give members of the jury a view of the bigger issues at play, a call that was echoed by Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto. In fact, this inquest is starting again after delays stemming from concerns that the jury roll has low on-reserve aboriginal representation. These jurors require the context for conducting a just inquest. Will the minister ensure that the jury roll significantly increases aboriginal representation in the interest of justice and equity for those two people?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Again, the member from Nickel Belt knows full well that neither we on this side of the House nor they on that side of the House should interfere with the coroner during an inquest. That would be inappropriate. That would be doing a disservice to the people. That would not be what she should want and what we will do. We trust in the system. She may not. We trust in the system, and I trust that the coroner will ensure that a proper inquest is held.

TENDER FRUIT INDUSTRY

Mr. Kim Craitor: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. In January 2008, my community of Niagara-on-the-Lake was dealt some extremely disappointing news. CanGro, a food processing company that produced products under the names of Del Monte and Aylmer, closed, putting over 150 workers out of work and taking a market away from tender fruit growers in my riding surrounding the area. In my early days, I worked there. I knew this plant inside out. The closure of this facility was a particularly difficult situation.

However, on February 13, I was pleased to announce an \$884,000 grant under the rural economic development program for Niagara Natural Fruit Snacks Inc., a company that has set up operations in the former CanGro plant—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I want to thank the honourable member and other members from the Niagara region who worked very hard to have me understand why the CanGro situation was one that we needed to pay some attention to.

My ministry has worked very closely with the company. I've heard from many people, and as a result of that and also working very closely with the Ministry of Economic Development, we have been able to partner with the new company. We have provided resources. As a result, we have supported an industry that is going to take

product from the Niagara region and they are going to produce a new fruit product, one that consumers today are very eager to have in their homes.

I say to the honourable member and to the members of this House, the rural economic development program has worked. It certainly works when you have a company that is willing to partner with us for the good of this industry.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Kim Craitor: Our economy is facing some difficult challenges, and of course my riding is no exception. The closure of the CanGro facility occurred before we really hit the global recession. Not only will this investment, in my opinion, create new jobs, but it will also provide new market opportunities for local farmers who were suddenly left without a market at the time of the announcement that the CanGro facility would be closing.

Could the minister please provide information on what actions our government has taken and will be taking in future to ensure a stable footing for the tender fruit industry in the Niagara region?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Our government has recognized the significance and the importance of the Niagara region and particularly the tender fruit industry. That is why we have invested \$25 million to help create the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre. We think that this is going to be a model of excellence in the country. Also, in March 2006, we provided \$150,000 to Brock University to advance innovation and research in the region's unique agricultural resources. Again, this is something that the industry has said is very important to them. We've been very happy to provide those dollars.

Also, as part of our Buy Ontario strategy, we launched the \$12-million, four-year Ontario market investment fund. This is a program that encourages partnerships with industry and business in all regions of the province to promote local food products. We believe that with the input we've received from—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

ABORIGINAL LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Toby Barrett: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Back in November, you told Haldimand county you would approve its official plan if it removed two properties from its urban boundary, properties that were included by the county in its 2006 plan. One of those properties is at Argyle Street and Sixth Line. It's adjacent to Douglas Creek Estates in Caledonia. Including this land in the official plan would have been the fiscally responsible thing to do. It would be much better for the people of Caledonia, it would help create jobs, and a development like this would boost the economy.

Minister, you've stuck your nose into Haldimand county's official plan. You've removed this parcel of land because it's adjacent to Douglas Creek Estates. Which way is it? Do native land disputes fall under provincial jurisdiction or federal jurisdiction?

Hon. Jim Watson: As the honourable member knows, the Minister and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing do have the legal and legislative authority to approve official plans. There's nothing new about that; it happened while he was a member of the governing party, so there's nothing out of the norm. We want to ensure that all official plans conform to growth plans, the provincial policy statements, and we work in concert and cooperation with the upper-tier government, in this case Haldimand county.

If the member has a specific concern, I'd be happy if he would address that either through me or specifically ask the folks at the county to bring it to our official's attention in our regional office, because we do work very cooperatively and we want to ensure that these official plans are approved as quickly as possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Minister, the concern is that you've gotten involved in this native land dispute. This is cold comfort for the hard-working builders. They're losing their investment through no fault of their own.

Yesterday, I learned that this property is on the verge of power of sale because the lender won't renew the mortgage. It's a 61-acre parcel of prime land. I will add that these lands were purchased well before the native land dispute.

1130

Minister, your inability to manage the native land dispute is costing these local builders, plus a Toronto commercial developer, close to \$2.6 million. If you aren't prepared to put this property back into Haldimand's official plan, please explain to the House and please explain to these people what kind of compensation you will put in place. Will you provide compensation? Or will you purchase this land, as you did the Douglas Creek Estates subdivision?

Hon. Jim Watson: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I thank the member for the question.

I welcome the member to join us in working to try to bring members of his community and members of the Haudenosaunee Six Nations together. We've been working very hard as a province to facilitate this coming together. The parties are at the table right now discussing how we can move forward to create greater stability by working together.

No more of the divisive approach: We need to bring parties together, and we need to recognize the root cause of these challenges, and that's a 200-year-old federal land claim. I invite the member to join us in asking and urging the federal government to redouble their efforts to resolve this federal land claim, because that's the root cause of the challenges that we face.

FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Labour. It has been almost two years since your govern-

ment promised that firefighters would receive compensation for diseases that they contracted as a result of their occupation. Volunteer firefighters still have not seen the results of your promise.

Gene Morand served as a volunteer firefighter for 40 years and passed away as a result of his workplace illness. His family is still waiting for the compensation that they deserve. Why is it that volunteer firefighters who bravely serve in this province and their families do not receive the compensation that they deserve?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: We understand the dangerous work that firefighters do. When people are running out of buildings and a fire is happening, firefighters are going in to protect our loved ones, to ensure that property is protected, and that's why our government recognizes the hazardous life and the threatening work that that brings on.

We have taken steps to ensure that firefighters and their families are treated with dignity and respect. We continue to consult, I say to the member, with the firefighters to ensure that we are taking care of them, that their health and safety is protected. That's why we brought the presumptive legislation with firefighters to address the eight cancers and other harming agents that are out there. We want to continue to work with firefighters—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Heifer dust. Volunteer and part-time firefighters serve this province bravely in the face of many workplace hazards. Those who contract diseases as a result of that service are deserving of their compensation.

In spite of the McGuinty government's promise to compensate all firefighters, it's shocking that the family of Gene Morand continues to fight for compensation that he clearly deserves.

When is this minister going to take real action and make sure that the compensation for work-related illnesses is provided to all firefighters—full-time, part-time and volunteers?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to the member: This government took a leadership stand when it brought forward presumptive legislation to address our firefighters. We have consulted on volunteer firefighters. With those consultations—and I continue to listen to stakeholders. They have been in my office; they have brought forward their concerns. We're considering those results right now to determine how we're going to move forward. We want to ensure that the health and safety of those firefighters is addressed, for the work they do for our communities, and that we support their families.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: It's my privilege and honour to welcome some residents from Etobicoke North, the parents of our current page Nancy Kanwal. They are in the members' gallery here: Satwinder Kanwal, Kuldeep Kanwal, Gundeep Kanwal, Parduman Kanwal and Harbans Kanwal. Welcome.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Welcome to the Ontario Legislature.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs. Julia Munro: In December, the Review of the Roots of Youth Violence called on the government to spend \$200 million per year on children's mental health. They reported that about one in five children experience a behavioural or mental health disorder requiring intervention, yet 80% receive no treatment of any kind. The lack of treatment allows the mental health condition to worsen. In some cases, the children start to do things to hurt others; in many more, they do harm to themselves.

The budget suggested by the review is the only recommendation with a specific number attached. Unfortunately, this government has failed to act on this recommendation and increase the budget. Last year's auditor's report pointed out the McGuinty government's underfunding of children's mental health. The government gave a 5% increase last year, after minimal or non-existent increases in previous years. Five per cent doesn't even cover inflation. Thousands are on waiting lists. Thousands are not getting the help they need. It is time for this government to begin to help them before their problems become worse, before it is too late.

STEPPIN' OUT FOR THE ARTS

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: On Saturday, February 28, I had the opportunity to attend the Steppin' Out for the Arts annual gala hosted by Brampton's mayor, Susan Fennell.

Now in its fifth year, this event raises money to support the performing arts in Brampton. Past proceeds from the gala have provided funding for initiatives such as the purchase of large instruments for use in performances at Brampton's Rose Theatre. This year's event had almost 800 attendees and entertainment was provided by various Canadian artists.

Another highlight of the event was the presentation of the mayor's lifetime achievement award. This year, the award was given to Ronald Webb, a successful lawyer from Brampton, who has provided years of community service to help better the community. I would like to commend Mayor Susan Fennell for hosting this event to promote performing arts in Brampton, and I would also like to congratulate Mr. Webb.

With the help of funding from events like this, my constituents will get the opportunity to see high-quality

performing arts closer to their homes. I look forward to attending this important event again in the near future.

TIBET

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Last Thursday, we stood as one in the House to honour the victims of Ukrainian genocide. Today, as hundreds of Tibetans march down Queen Street, we should stand as one to prevent the same horror from happening in Tibet. Letters are going out from my office announcing the second meeting of the Ontario Parliamentary Friends of Tibet, the sister group to the Ottawa Friends of Tibet. I hope all MPPs here will attend that luncheon.

Today marks 50 years of resistance by Tibetans against Chinese occupation; 50 years of cultural genocide, of the removal of foreign press from Tibet, of the beating and imprisonment of monks and nuns, the torture and death of Tibetan women and children. This is an historic opportunity for the world. Today anyone who cares about justice, freedom, democracy and independence stands with Tibetans. Today we stand in solidarity with the people of Tibet. Today we pray with them and His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Free Tibet; Tibet for Tibetans.

URGENT CARE

Mr. Khalil Ramal: The London members of this House are proud that their city is always leading the pack in innovative health programs and technology that sets the standard for Ontario to follow. St. Joseph's Health Care officially opened its urgent-care centre on Saturday. Minister Bentley, Minister Matthews and I were there to participate in the grand opening of this vital project. It's designed to handle patients who urgently need care but are not in life-threatening situations.

This idea was launched in 2005, when a trial urgent-care centre was established and 44,000 patients used the facility in the first year alone. Since then, demand has grown and the St. Joseph's Health Care Foundation answered with building an appropriate centre to help patients in a speedy and careful manner. Our constituents demanded a centre that serves them efficiently and they received it. They wanted a system where the current emergency room is reserved for people who need immediate care and a different unit focuses on lesser emergencies.

The people of London would like to thank St. Joseph's Health Care Foundation, who helped transform the centre with their generous donation of \$400,000 to support this urgent-care centre, and especially the president of this foundation, Michelle Campbell. Good luck. I wish them luck and success in the future.

TIBET

Mr. Randy Hillier: In the past, I have spoken for those who cannot be heard. I rise again as a voice for those who are silenced half a world away.

Today I proudly stood with those who strive for justice, democracy and freedom. Fifty years ago, Communist China used deadly force to crush Tibetan freedoms. The Dalai Lama has stated that the Communist Party of China has transformed Tibet into "a hell on earth."

The Chinese authorities regard Tibetans as "criminals deserving to be put to death." This brutal crackdown on the Tibetan people denies rights that we take for granted here: rights to self-determination, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, movement, expression and travel. Since 1987, at least 41 Tibetans have died as a result of torture in Chinese prisons. Human rights groups have confirmed over 700 political prisoners inside Tibet, many of them detained without charge or without trial.

As free people, we must encourage the free world to act. I ask all of you to join with me and lend your voice to those who are oppressed a world away: join the Parliamentary Friends of Tibet and free Tibet.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm proud to rise today in recognition and support of the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, which took effect last week. This is a subject that has been particularly close to my heart for many years, and I'm very proud of our government's achievements in this area.

The Provincial Animal Welfare Act has the strongest animal protection laws in Canada, and it marks the beginning of a new era in animal protection in Ontario. In addition to the basic standards of care outlined in the act, the legislation also contains standards that apply to captive wildlife animals, including special standards for captive primates—in other words, the roadside zoo issue. It also requires veterinarians to report suspected abuse and neglect and protects them from personal liability for doing so. Furthermore, it creates a specific offence for causing harm to a law enforcement animal such as a police horse or a police dog.

1510

I'd like to congratulate Minister Bartolucci and the entire staff of his ministry on the passage of this bill. It's been a pleasure working with them. I would also like to recognize a number of organizations that played a large role in ensuring the protection of animals in Ontario and who have been a stalwart partner in this animal welfare legislation, particularly the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the College of Veterinarians of Ontario, the World Society for the Protection of Animals, and the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association.

Our penalties are the toughest in the country. I hope other provinces and jurisdictions follow Ontario's lead.

SCHOOL CALENDAR

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise today to speak on behalf of families, working students and tourism operators who are

frustrated by proposed changes to the 2009-10 school calendar. I'm asking the Minister of Education to use her powers to make sure that school boards across the province go back to school after Labour Day. There are a number of ways she can do this: by not approving school calendars that start before Labour Day, by moving professional activity days to the first week of September so school can start after Labour Day, or by reducing the number of in-school instruction days to 190 for the 2009-10 year. All of these can be done with the stroke of a pen.

Isn't it interesting that the creation of Family Day actually made the situation worse? I received an e-mail from a former board chair from my riding, and she writes: "Since Family Day was introduced and made mandatory, the school calendar has been affected since it is difficult to find the right number of days.... Isn't it ironic that Family Day was to allow families extra time together but now it has made it difficult for families to complete their vacation?"

The minister continues to merely sit back and let the school boards and communities work it out. In Parry Sound-Muskoka, the Trillium Lakelands District School Board has heard from the community that the proposed changes will be damaging to businesses and families; however, they are still proposing that the school year start before Labour Day.

In these challenging times, it is now time for the minister to step in and act.

ABRAHAM D. SHADD
AND BRYAN PRINCE

Mr. Pat Hoy: I rise today to pay tribute to Abraham D. Shadd and Bryan Prince, two extraordinary black Canadians.

Recently, I took part in the unveiling of the Abraham D. Shadd Canada Post stamp at the Buxton National Historic Site and Museum. The stamp celebrates the accomplishments of this hero and immortalizes Shadd's legacy in history. He fought for equal rights for blacks both here in Canada and in the United States. Shadd was the first black man elected to political office in Canada when he became councillor for Raleigh township in 1859. This prestigious tribute is a testament to the unprecedented contributions he made to the Underground Railroad effort and his tireless work to abolish slavery. We thank him for the part he played for freedom, equality and justice.

Last month, Bryan Prince, a historian and award-winning author from Buxton, launched his latest book, *A Shadow on the Household*. This is an extraordinary story of one couple's boundless determination to free themselves and their children from slavery and to make a new life in Canada. The first printing of this book is already sold out, and a second printing is on its way for distribution in the United States. The *Globe and Mail* called it "a superb piece of scholarship." This historical work enriches our knowledge and understanding of the past and reminds us of the great value that lies in the preserving and telling of stories.

Please join me in recognizing Abraham D. Shadd and Bryan Prince for their outstanding contributions to building a tolerant, compassionate and diverse province for our children and generations to come.

MARC DIAB

Mr. Charles Sousa: I rise today in honour of our Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan and to reflect on the brave men and women who have lost their lives in pursuit of peace and stability. I would like to pay special tribute to the 112th soldier who died with valour only weeks before his return home to Mississauga.

Our community was greatly saddened to learn that 22-year-old trooper Marc Diab was killed on March 7 by a roadside improvised explosive device which also wounded four of his comrades. Marc served with the Royal Canadian Dragoons and was participating in security operations in Shah Wali Kot, northeast of Kandahar city.

His family and friends all remember him for being a cheerful and uplifting man who always made people around him happy. He was an active member of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Catholic Church, where he worked with young people.

Marc always dreamed of being a soldier, and his mother remembers that it was his great wish since childhood to serve our country. Marc's death is not in vain. He was doing his part to build and help rebuild a torn nation, a work that he loved immensely. Marc Diab will be dearly missed.

On behalf of this House and the people of Mississauga, I offer our sincere condolences to his loving family. Marc will be remembered as a true hero.

At this time, I ask the House to observe a moment of silence to honour Trooper Diab and our fallen soldiers. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask all members to rise and observe a moment of silence in remembrance of our Canadian forces.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HEALTHY DECISIONS
FOR HEALTHY EATING ACT, 2009
LOI DE 2009
FAVORISANT DES CHOIX SAINS
POUR UNE ALIMENTATION SAINE

M^{me} Gelinas moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 156, An Act to amend various acts respecting nutritional information and trans fat content of foods and drinks provided by food service premises / Projet de loi

156, Loi modifiant diverses lois qui traitent de l'information nutritionnelle et de la teneur en gras trans des aliments et boissons fournis par les lieux de restauration.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Nickel Belt has a moment to explain her bill.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Basically, the bill amends the Health Protection and Promotion Act to require food service premises with total gross annual revenues of greater than \$5 million to disclose certain nutritional information for the foods and drinks served at the premises. The bill also limits the amount of trans fats that may be contained in such foods and drinks.

Les personnes qui ne respectent pas les exigences imposées peuvent se voir imposer des amendes, et leur permis commercial peut être suspendu ou révoqué.

PETITIONS

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontarians are angry over the volatility of the MPAC tax assessment system; the near impossibility to predict one's assessment or to understand how it is arrived at, the patent unfairness of assessments and that the current system leaves many homeowners worried they may be forced to sell their homes; and

"Whereas changes are needed that will make Ontario's property tax system stable, understandable, fair, and sensitive to homeowners; and

"Whereas property assessments in Parkdale-High Park have risen between 28% and 45% between 2005 and 2008;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: Support the 'freeze till sale' plan to bring fairness to Ontario's property tax system so that new assessments happen only at the time of sale and when a building permit is obtained for renovations totalling more than \$40,000."

I absolutely agree with this and affix my signature and give it to Tariq to deliver.

1520

INTERPROVINCIAL BRIDGE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas:

"(1) ROCHE-NCE, a consulting firm hired to study potential sites for an interprovincial crossing between Ottawa and Gatineau, is recommending that an interprovincial bridge across the Ottawa River be built at

Kettle Island, connecting to the scenic Aviation Parkway in Ottawa, turning it into a four-lane commuter and truck route passing through downtown residential communities;

“(2) Along the proposed route are homes, seniors’ apartments, schools, parks, the Montfort Long Term Care Facility and the Montfort Hospital, all of which would be severely impacted by noise, vibration and disease-causing air pollution;

“(3) A truck and commuter route through neighbourhoods is a safety issue because of the increased risk to pedestrians and cyclists and the transport of hazardous materials; and

“(4) There are other, more suitable corridors further east, outside of the downtown core, which would have minimal impact on Ottawa residents;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To reject the recommendation of a bridge at Kettle Island and to select a more suitable corridor to proceed to phase two of the interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study.”

I agree with this petition, sign it and send it to the table by page Nancy.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition from the constituents concerned about the future of Burk’s Falls and District Health Centre. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Burk’s Falls and District Health Centre provides vital health services for residents of Burk’s Falls and the Almaguin Highlands of all ages, as well as seasonal residents and tourists; and

“Whereas the health centre helps to reduce demand on the Huntsville hospital emergency room; and

“Whereas the operating budget for Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is insufficient to meet the growing demand for service in the communities of Muskoka–East Parry Sound; and

“Whereas budget pressures could jeopardize continued operation of the Burk’s Falls health centre;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the McGuinty government and Minister of Health provide adequate increases in the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to maintain current health services, including those provided by the Burk’s Falls health centre.”

I support this petition.

LUPUS

Mr. Kim Craitor: I’m pleased to introduce this petition to the House. I want to thank the Lupus Foundation of Ontario, located in Ridgeway, for providing me with the petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

“Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

“Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

“We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario.”

I’m pleased to sign this petition in support of it.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care should recognize the importance of rural health care in Ontario; and

“Whereas the Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network commissioned a report by the Hay Group that recommends downgrading the emergency room at the Charlotte Eleanor Englehart (CEE) Hospital in Petrolia to an urgent-care ward; and

“Whereas, if accepted, that recommendation would increase the demand on emergency room services in Sarnia; and

“Whereas, as of today, many patients are already redirected from Sarnia to the Petrolia emergency room for medical care; and

“Whereas the Petrolia medical community has stated that the loss of this emergency room will result in the loss of many of our local doctors; and

“Whereas the Petrolia medical community has stated that the loss of this emergency room will result in the loss of many of our local doctors; and

“Whereas Petrolia’s retirement and nursing home communities are dependent on easy access to the CEE hospital;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to urge the Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network to completely reject the report of the Hay Group and leave the emergency room designation at Charlotte Eleanor Englehart Hospital” as is.

I agree with this petition and I will affix my signature and send it with Patrick.

HIGHWAY 17/174

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Highway 17/174 needs to be expanded to four lanes from Trim Road to Prescott-Russell Regional Road 8 in order to enhance road safety; and....

"Whereas this highway represents the main artery for the working population of Clarence-Rockland, Alfred and Plantagenet and Hawkesbury to access the national capital; and....

"Whereas the city of Ottawa passed a council resolution asking that either the province or the united counties of Prescott and Russell take the lead in the environmental assessments; and

"Whereas both the federal and provincial governments have each committed \$40 million towards the widening of Highway 17/174;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide the necessary funding to the united counties of Prescott and Russell to undertake the environmental assessments required for the widening of Highway 17/174 from two to four lanes between Trim Road and Prescott-Russell Regional Road 8."

I gladly add my signature to it.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to present a petition on behalf of the 9,000 men and women who work on our transit system here in Toronto and of Bob Kinnear, their president.

"Whereas too many innocent people are being victimized by acts of violence while using public transit; and

"Whereas too many public transit employees are being victimized by acts of violence while working to serve the public; and

"Whereas we need to send a strong message of zero tolerance for violence on public transit;

"Whereas anyone harming or carrying a weapon on public transit should be dealt with by the full force of the law; and

"Whereas public transit riders and workers have the right to ride and work on public transit free of violence, intimidation and harm;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to put an end to violence on public transit" and support "Bill 151 to crack down on violence on public transit."

I support this petition and affix my name to it.

SALES TAX

Mr. Pat Hoy: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the auto industry in Ontario and throughout North America is experiencing a major restructuring; and

"Whereas the current economic crisis is affecting the auto manufacturers and the front-line dealerships throughout Ontario; and

"Whereas many potential automobile purchasers are having difficulty accessing credit even at current prices; and

"Whereas a three-month tax holiday of the GST and the PST on the purchase of new and used cars and trucks would stimulate auto sales;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the provincial and federal governments to implement a three-month tax holiday, and that the Ontario Minister of Finance include the PST holiday in the next provincial budget."

This is signed by a number of persons from Tilbury and Leamington, and I too will sign it.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition signed by a number of constituents from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of" the province of "Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

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"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act as above to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks' table.

BATHURST HEIGHTS
ADULT LEARNING CENTRE

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition signed by thousands of students who attend the Toronto District School Board ESL program at Bathurst Heights.

"Whereas there are over 2,000 adult ESL students being served by the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre, operated by the Toronto District School Board...; and

"Whereas this is the only English-as-a-second-language (ESL) learning centre" in the area and is located right on the subway; and

"Whereas newcomers in Toronto, and in the Lawrence Heights area, need the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre so they can succeed in their career opportunities; and

"Whereas the proposed revitalization of Lawrence Heights threatens the existence of the centre;

"Therefore we, the undersigned," request "that any revitalization of Lawrence Heights include a newcomer centre and ensure that the Bathurst Heights centre continues to exist in the present location."

I support the students at Bathurst Heights and affix my name to this petition.

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the meeting times of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to revert to motions to allow for a motion relating to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that, notwithstanding the order of the House of May 1, 2008, respecting meeting times for committees, the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly be authorized to meet in the afternoon on Wednesday, March 25, 2009, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., in addition to its regularly scheduled meeting time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

APOLOGY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR

LA PRÉSENTATION D'EXCUSES

Mr. Bentley moved third reading of the following bill:
Bill 108, An Act respecting apologies / Projet de loi 108, Loi concernant la présentation d'excuses.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I return to the Attorney General to lead off the debate.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: At the beginning, I should indicate I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the MPP for Willowdale, and with the MPP for Sault Ste. Marie.

We are now in third reading, and I'm going to urge every member of the House to support this piece of legislation. This act recognizes in legislation what it is our natural human response to do, and that is, simply, that if an individual has done wrong or even thinks they have done wrong that has caused harm to others, the natural human response is to apologize. It is important for the one who might have committed the wrong. It is important as well for the one who might have been harmed. It facilitates and improves the healing process. Unfortunately, the law, for all its strengths, has got in the way of us expressing that natural human emotion.

I want to give credit where credit is due here. Some time ago, my colleague the MPP for Sault Ste. Marie, David Oraziatti, introduced a private member's bill about this very issue. That private member's legislation is the foundation for the act that we now have before the House today.

I want to also give credit to my colleague because, when he introduced the piece of legislation, he spoke with various legal organizations and with others—medical organizations—to make sure that what he was introducing would not take away from the legal rights of victims and would not harm prosecutions, whether criminal or provincial offence.

We were greatly assisted by and greatly guided by the work that the MPP for Sault Ste. Marie did in introducing his legislation. This is a piece of legislation that recognizes and supports the natural human emotion. It does not, as I say, and it will not, harm criminal prosecutions, Provincial Offences Act prosecutions. It will not harm ongoing rights to recovery on the part of victims.

We're not the first jurisdiction to do this. In fact, a number of jurisdictions in Canada have done it, and for decades, many in the United States have taken the lead on this issue and have introduced similar legislation. It is simply a recognition, as I say, that we support people doing the right thing to do.

Will it facilitate healing? Absolutely. Will it facilitate a shorter litigation process? I suspect so. Will it facilitate earlier and better settlements in some cases? I suspect so. How can anybody argue against that? It protects rights; supports the natural human emotion.

I know that a number of members of the House have already had the opportunity to speak in a positive way about this. I look forward to a continuation of the debate, and I look forward, as I say, to the support of all members of the House, with thanks to my colleague, my parliamentary assistant, for his hard work on this piece of legislation.

Thanks again to the MPP for Sault Ste. Marie for taking this issue, researching it and introducing legislation which is the foundation of what we have here before the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. David Oraziatti: It's a pleasure to speak to third reading of the Apology Act this afternoon. I certainly want to thank Attorney General Bentley for introducing

this bill and for leading the way on this legislation through the committee process. As well, I want to thank the member from Willowdale, David Zimmer, for all of his support, as well as members in this House who have spoken very positively on this particular piece of legislation. I think, regardless of what side of the House you are on, any time you introduce a bill that passes as a private member's bill or is adopted by the government and passes, that's the spirit of democracy in this place working well. Ontarians can know and take heart that this is an effective Legislature in that regard. So I want to, first of all, thank members of the House for their very positive comments on what is an important piece of legislation.

The origin of this legislation—and I will recall this briefly. Several years ago, I had a conversation with a senior executive at our local hospital. We expressed similar concerns about the challenges in the health care sector around issues that arise where there may be a medical error or something goes wrong in the health care sector. I certainly have had the experience of having individuals come to my constituency office who have indicated to me that they would like more information about their particular health care issue and weren't able to get it for various reasons, and I think we all in the House know what some of those reasons are.

In discussing this particular issue, I thought it would be appropriate, and after doing some research, found that it was appropriate, to introduce a bill that would hopefully resolve this issue. What I found out was that in British Columbia in 2006, in Saskatchewan in 2007 and Manitoba in 2007, bills that were very similar to the bill that we're hoping to pass in this Legislature and that is going through third reading right now around apology legislation were adopted by these provinces.

The Attorney General is quite right. In the United States, nine US states have comprehensive apology legislation that deals with a sector broader than health care. There are also 26 other US states that have some form of apology legislation specifically in the health care sector.

After having discussions with a number of individuals in the field, and I will just briefly talk about those, it was very, very apparent that these individuals supported this type of legislation and wanted to see it passed, as it has passed in other jurisdictions in Canada and the United States.

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One of the most important reasons we are doing this is because patients and Ontarians in the health care sector are saying that they want more information and they deserve the right to know their current status, their medical condition, and what may have gone wrong with the treatment they may have received. On the other side of that, the medical community—physicians, nurses and other health care professionals—have very strongly advocated for this legislation as well. They also support this. They don't want to be hiding this information or not being forthright with the people they are trying to take care of. But we all know that the overarching restriction

here in place in Ontario presently is the insurance mechanisms around doing what is right. So if a doctor or a nurse were to acknowledge an error while they were taking care of an individual, their insurance company would not provide coverage for them. This could very well mean the loss of their job and a loss of their livelihood. That's something that obviously many people are not prepared to put ahead of doing what probably should be done and what they acknowledge should be done. So there is a legal barrier right now that exists in the province of Ontario that we want to lift to ensure that both patients and residents in Ontario, as well as those who are health care providers in the province, are able to acknowledge.

Phil Hassen, a former Ontario Deputy Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, is now the president and CEO of the Canadian Patient Safety Institute. Phil Hassen works in Edmonton—that's where this organization is based—and he came here to Toronto to support this particular piece of legislation and made some very poignant comments around the importance of this legislation. On behalf of patients and residents across Canada, he is saying that this is the right thing to do and this is the right step to take.

Dr. Janice Willett, the former president of the Ontario Medical Association, who works in the riding that I represent, in Sault Ste. Marie, was here as well to say on behalf of the Ontario Medical Association that their organization supports it. Subsequently, Ken Arnold, who is the current president of the OMA, has indicated his support for this. Doris Grinspun of the Registered Nurses' Association, Tom Closson of the hospital association—the list is fairly lengthy. As well, I should point out that the Ontario Bar Association and the legal community are very interested in seeing an appropriate resolution to situations where apologies need to be given or there is a desire to give an apology that won't have an impact on a civil proceeding. So the list of those people who are supporting this type of legislation in the province is lengthy, and they made some very reflective comments based on the organizations that they represent. I'm certainly very appreciative of those comments.

I think it's also important to point out what the legislation is not going to do. It is not in any way going to compromise an individual's right to seek a remedy in the court system that they would otherwise be entitled to. I think that's very important. If somebody feels that they have been wronged by a certain organization or an individual, they certainly have the right to pursue that remedy in the court system today, and would, if this legislation is passed, also have the right to pursue that particular remedy. So it is not taking away anyone's rights.

The research, I think, is very clear on the benefits of this type of legislation, and this is really the secondary reason in terms of why we're doing this. The primary reason in my mind is because this is the right thing to do for the people of Ontario, because they are advocating for it—both the health care professionals, the residents, and

those people who would be in contact with our health care system. But there's also another side to this which demonstrates that this is a huge savings financially to the people of Ontario.

There has been much more experience with this type of legislation in the United States simply because it has been in place longer, and I would suspect that over a number of years in this country, as well we will have a similar experience in terms of those particular savings in this country as well.

I'll give you a couple of examples, and I won't belabour the point. The Missouri Medical Law Report in 2005 indicated that malpractice lawsuits and notices of intent to sue had fallen from 262 in 2001 to about 130 a year, and their legal fees had dropped from \$3 million to about \$1 million. It's also indicating that people are getting an acknowledgement for something that they want.

People in the legal community will tell you that their client might bring an application for a proceeding that, if they had an apology, they might not otherwise bring. In other words, they're taking the legal action based on principle, or to make a point, because they know that they're right. But the reality is that in many cases, they would prefer an acknowledgement and somebody recognizing what has been done to them. They also want that information, because in many cases it's important that they have that information so they can take the next appropriate step in their health care or treatment.

The American Bar Association indicated that, on this point, about 30% of plaintiffs would not have taken legal action had there been an apology. The internal medicine digest, 1996, indicated that 17% of patients would sue if a physician informed the patient of an error, and 29% indicated that if they weren't informed, they would take legal action later if they found out about the error. So the research, I think, is also very clear.

Again, the point is that this is the right step to take, because Ontarians will benefit from this. The health care community—although this is a comprehensive piece of legislation, not simply a focused apology bill on the health care sector; it is comprehensive in that regard. It will have implications for other areas, but the largest area of impact obviously is in the health care sector and, by extension, our court system. It will reduce costs to all Ontarians. Patient groups want this, health care advocates want this and the legal community supports this.

Again, I want to encourage all members to support Bill 108. I want to thank the committee for the recommendations they have brought back for third reading and thank the Attorney General again for introducing the legislation.

I know that the parliamentary assistant here, the member from Willowdale, has some remarks that he'd like to make, so I'm going to turn the time over to Mr. Zimmer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Willowdale.

Mr. David Zimmer: I am pleased to rise in support of Bill 108, the Apology Act, 2009.

The legislation, if passed, is going to finally allow people in Ontario to apologize for a mistake or wrongdoing without fear that the apology could be used in lawsuits against them.

There are a number of lawyers here in this chamber, and I know first-hand from my conversations with them that they often find themselves having to advise clients not to apologize when they find themselves in a situation of error or wrongdoing.

Offering an apology may be the first instinctual reaction that a person has when they think they might have wronged someone, but unfortunately, under our current legal system, that natural act, that natural instinct to say you're sorry, to apologize, has been curtailed because of very technical legal repercussions. For instance, professional organizations and associations—that is, insurance companies and insurance adjusters—in addition to lawyers, often require their clients not to apologize and not to acknowledge errors that may have been made. If they don't do that, often there's a denial of coverage. That's a severe consequence.

This legislation is not meant to underline liability in civil legal proceedings under the provincial law; far from it. What it is meant to do is to allow the expression of common decency, the common decency of offering an apology.

An apology can go a long way in resolving the hard feelings between a person who has committed an error—an error in judgment, a mistake—and the person who has suffered because of that mistake or error in judgment.

As I said earlier in the House, when I spoke to this legislation at second reading, this proposed bill would change the law to allow people to freely, instinctually, emotionally apologize, to recognize the pain and the suffering that their mistake or error has caused. But it will not stand in the way of a victim's ability to seek compensation for any harm that's been done. What it does is simply allow individuals and organizations such as hospitals to apologize for an accident, for a wrongdoing, without that apology being used as evidence of liability in a civil proceeding under our current provincial laws.

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It's the right thing to do. It's the right thing to set a context where people can offer a sincere, instinctual apology or an expression of regret without the fear of the consequences of making that expression. This will help victims by acknowledging that harm has been done to them. It will help them in the healing process. It will help the person who's committed the error, the error in judgment or the mistake in coming to grips with the harm that they've caused.

Ours is not the first jurisdiction to introduce apology legislation. If passed, this bill will make Ontario the fifth jurisdiction in Canada to pass this type of legislation. The experience in those jurisdictions that have implemented this type of legislation has been positive from everybody's point of view, from the person who's committed the mistake or the error of judgment, to the person who suffered the harm, to the institutions that have to deal

with the fallout and the consequences of that harm. There is plenty of evidence to support moving forward with this apology legislation.

I want to recognize, as the Attorney General did, the member from Sault Ste. Marie, David Oraziotti, who introduced this private member's bill into the Legislature. I want to take a moment to commend, to recognize, Mr. Oraziotti for the tremendous work and drive he put behind pushing this legislation through. His private member's bill has formed the basis of the legislation that we're dealing with today that was introduced in Bill 108.

Secondly, when our government introduced the Apology Act, we listened to members of the Legislature, we listened to members of the public, we listened to institutions, to insurance companies, to law societies, and we listened throughout the committee hearings that we held with respect to this bill. Bill 108 would allow people to make an apology without taking away any other rights that they may have. I say to my colleagues in this Legislature that when you read the copy of this very short bill, you can very quickly and easily note the definition of "apology" and you can easily figure out the intent of the legislation.

The definition of "apology," as set out in the legislation, is stated as: "'apology' means an expression of sympathy or regret, a statement that a person is sorry or any other words or actions indicating contrition or commiseration, whether or not the words or actions admit fault or liability or imply an admission of fault or liability in connection with the matter to which the words or actions relate." That's the definition. The legislation then goes on to say, "An apology made by or on behalf of a person in connection with any matter ... shall not be taken into account in any determination of fault or liability in connection with that matter."

The Apology Act simply removes the legal barrier to apologies for harm done and harm suffered. I urge all members to support this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I want to thank the minister and the members from Willowdale and Sault Ste. Marie.

I now have a better understanding of this Apology Act from the Liberal government. We now know that we can apologize without having liability. I guess what's interesting, I find here, is that I expect to hear many apologies from the other side as soon as this bill is passed and proclaimed into law. They'll be able to apologize for our have-not status. They'll be able to apologize for our loss of manufacturing jobs. They'll be able to apologize for their appalling behaviour as a government. We really look forward, on this side of the House, to seeing this bill proclaimed into law and the long queue or lineup of Liberals at the apology desk.

We must congratulate the Liberal government for bringing out this Apology Act, and we all look forward to the long list of apologies that we'll be hearing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I guess our interpretation of this is a little different than everyone else's. This prevents the apologies of individuals or companies from being used as admission of fault or liability in a civil or administrative proceeding or arbitration. It protects insurance or indemnity coverage from being void or impaired on account of the apology. Unlike other apology bills passed in the United States, this bill provides protection for apologies that express both regret and liability. Yes, in spite of the psychological and emotional benefits to the victims, some argue there is greater harm done to the victims by reducing the chances they will receive compensation when it is rightfully due.

Dugald Christie, a BC poor advocate and pro bono lawyer who set up over 60 legal clinics, argued strongly against an almost identical bill that has since been passed in BC. He argued that this type of bill would stand in the way of much-needed financial compensation to those who need it most. To give you an example of this, if someone, for instance, left an instrument in a person in an operation by mistake and that individual passed away, that individual's spouse—

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: —may have a \$50,000 mortgage that no longer will be paid by that person, who was the breadwinner.

There is no such thing as malpractice in Canada, because you sign a waiver when you have an operation. That member might want to look into that.

The bottom line is, we agree with the fact that it's good to apologize and it's good for the person to maybe have some closure, but you haven't looked at this from a legal perspective. You've just pushed it through, without talking to lawyers and people who could be affected by this. We in the NDP will not be supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Indeed, I thought the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington might be apologizing for that early leadership speech, but one never knows what happens in this House.

But let me get to the bill here: Bill 108, the Apology Act. Certainly over the last number of months, this issue was brought to this House in a private member's bill from my colleague the member from Sault Ste. Marie. After the Attorney General reviewed the private member's bill, he thought it would be appropriate to incorporate it into a government bill.

We do know that over 30 United States states and most Australian states have enacted apology legislation to various degrees. We have the very progressive Premier from Manitoba, the Honourable Gary Doer, who had the Manitoba Legislature pass legislation in 2007. The Legislature in Saskatchewan in 2007 passed apology legislation. Back in 2006, British Columbia passed such legislation.

For many of us, apologizing for a mistake or wrongdoing is simply just the right thing to do, and under current laws, people may be reluctant to apologize out of

fear that their words will be used against them in future civil proceedings.

I had the opportunity to be the Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy when this bill was amended, about a week or so ago, and to hear thoughts on this bill from both the member from Welland and the member from Oshawa. They provided some very interesting commentary on this bill from their experience here in the House, but, by and large, I think the amended bill is a progressive piece of legislation that we want to move forward.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

One of the government members has two minutes to reply.

Mr. David Oraziatti: I'm pleased to provide additional comments on Bill 108. I think it's very clear here—and I'm looking forward to seeing the vote on this particular piece of legislation. It will certainly tell members of the public where people stand on this particular issue. This is an issue that is supported by the patient safety organizations in this country, by individuals who are fighting for patient rights for individuals who have been adversely affected by something in the health care field and want the acknowledgement of an apology and want the disclosure of information that can help them further their treatment or indicate what their next steps need to be.

In addition, nurses, doctors—health care professionals in this province—want this legislation. They have indicated clearly that they support it because they know it's the right thing to do. As health care professionals who take the oath of helping individuals in their most challenging and trying times, they want the opportunity to fully disclose all of the information to the patients and the people that they are trying to help.

The problem as it stands in Ontario today is that insurance companies will revoke insurance or indicate to the individual that they are no longer covered if this goes to court and they indicate any responsibility. Now, we know that that is not the right thing to do, but that's the legalistic insurance legislation and the steps that they have taken. So this bill allows us to lift that legal barrier and allow for some empathy, some understanding and some consideration for doing what's right, for an individual in the health care field to be able to express what they need to express.

The member from the NDP who spoke a few minutes ago is dead wrong on this issue. I am interested in seeing where people stand on this bill when it's voted on and called finally for third reading.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I am pleased to speak today with respect to Bill 108, An Act respecting apologies, on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party.

I really find that I'm beginning the third reading debate on this bill in much the same vein as I started

second reading debate, which is that I do support this bill, but I do so somewhat reluctantly, notwithstanding the fact that we did not receive any major opposition to this bill in committee; in fact, quite the contrary. But I think it is important to note once again for the record some of my concerns with respect to this legislation and just have them be noted for the future.

This act, of course, deals with civil litigation matters and provides that an apology cannot be considered to be an admission of liability with respect to a civil action. Some of the major types of lawsuits that this legislation would contemplate would include, as the member from Sault Ste. Marie has indicated, medical malpractice litigation; it would also cover things like motor vehicle accidents where someone is seriously injured—those types of situations.

So I think it's important to note that one of the major concerns with respect to this kind of legislation is that apologies would become trivialized, that they would become some sort of a boilerplate apology, with the result that it would have no meaning; it would just be a simple matter of saying you're sorry and it gets you off the hook. This has certainly been addressed by a number of lawyers. I did refer to one particular paper in second reading debate, and I would like to refer to it again now because I think it bears repeating. That was a paper written by two lawyers, Benjamin Bathgate and Joseph C. D'Angelo, called Better Safe Than Sorry? These lawyers raise the possibility that this type of legislation could trivialize apologies, and said, "Another concern is that apologies can become trivialized and meaningless if the defendant knows that they will not be admissible and the mere act of apologizing could either prevent a lawsuit from being commenced or reduce the amount of potential damages for which the defendant is liable." So I would submit that this does remain a very real concern.

A second consideration, especially in the context of medical malpractice actions, is that people could be intimidated by an apology and prevented from either commencing an action or seeking the level of damages to which they are actually entitled. This has been expressed as a positive by the government in the sense that there could be a reduction in the number of lawsuits that could be commenced. As much as 30% of all litigation, it has been estimated, could be prevented if apology legislation were enacted.

It can work the other way, however. It could mean a sense that people have not been able to or have not felt that there's a climate such that they could bring a lawsuit forward and have it be seriously considered by the courts, particularly in some small communities where perhaps there might only be one physician, one specialist of a certain sort. I think that we have to be really careful how this kind of legislation is going to be used.

Having said all of that, we didn't actually hear very much in committee in a negative sense, and in fact there weren't even that many individuals or groups presenting submissions to the committee. We did not actually have hearings for the committee; we just received written

submissions. We heard from a few individuals, and then we heard from mostly lawyers and/or medical groups, including the Advocate's Society, the Ontario Bar Association, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, the Ontario Hospital Association, the Canadian Medical Protective Association, and the ADR Institute of Ontario, Inc., which is of course an alternative dispute or mediation organization. We didn't receive a huge amount of opposition to it.

We are prepared to support it. I would just like to just refer to a couple of the comments that were made by some of the organizations, quoting first from the submission made by the Ontario Bar Association, who indicated that they wanted to have a few small changes made but not really to the crux of the legislation. They made several what I consider to be very helpful comments. They said, by way of introduction: "Not surprisingly, a remedial statute which proposes to take hold of a basic element of human interaction has also captured our members' interest. Our members recognize that the bill will be launched into uncharted waters of judicial interpretation. Ultimately, they are comforted to some extent by the fact the legislation will render apologies inadmissible in many contexts, but the parties will be free to litigate the facts to which they refer. Nor can the Legislature regulate the sincerity of apologies. A genuine apology is a social virtue. An insincere one can aggravate conflict. It is up to the apologizer to get it right and to make it right." Certainly I would reiterate the view that the sincerity of the apology is going to be extremely important if there is to be any benefit obtained from it.

Similarly, with respect to the submission that was made by the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, they had some very interesting viewpoints from people in the front line of health care. Again I'd like to quote from their submission: "Registered nurses, like all health care professionals, are familiar with the silence mode into which health professionals fall when there is an error. They have been advised not to apologize because it can come back to haunt them, even when open communication with a patient is what is most needed to build the relationship between patient and provider and improve the patient's health. By protecting health care professionals who express a sincere apology, Bill 108 will be of great benefit to patients and health care providers. It is a good in itself for the individuals involved, and it is collectively beneficial for fostering a culture of candour in the health care system which will facilitate systemic improvement. It is for this reason that the RNAO strongly endorses Bill 108, the Apology Act 2008, as written."

All that being said, that is why we in the Progressive Conservative Party are prepared to support this bill, in the hope that a sincere apology will bring about a healing and a reconciliation between parties in a dispute to the extent that a monetary award in itself could never do.

In this respect, I would just like to indicate that, as the member from Sault Ste. Marie indicated, there have been

similar types of legislation enacted in many other jurisdictions, including 35 states in the United States and three other provinces in Canada, including British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, although I should note that it was declined in Yukon some months ago. So there has been a little bit of controversy with respect to this type of litigation, but generally speaking, where it has been raised, it has been passed.

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In conclusion, I would submit that I think in our society generally there has been a movement towards more conciliation, towards more mediation and other types of dispute resolution, and we've seen several recent examples of that, particularly with the apologies that the federal government has made to Chinese Canadians and to our First Nations peoples.

We also have a movement towards collaboration in family law, for example. There are a whole group of lawyers who are engaging in collaborative family law, which is aiming at getting away from some of the really nasty kinds of disputes that we can see in family law with respect to the separation of property and with respect to custody of and access to children. So that is a very positive process, in my view, where you get the parties together in a room, you get their lawyers there, and both parties work towards a win-win solution that's not only in the best interests of each other but in the best interests of the children, which is obviously what the whole goal is: to achieve their protection and their best interests and their happiness in the long term.

So I would submit that we should consider adopting the same approach with respect to disputes in the civil litigation context, and for this reason, we are pleased to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. David Oraziotti: It is a pleasure to respond to the comments of the member from Whitby—Oshawa, and I want to thank her for her constructive comments on this issue. Being a lawyer and having a legal background, she certainly brings insight to this issue. She has obviously done her homework and made an effort to decide, on balance, that this is the best way to go in terms of improving our court system and doing what's right for people in this province.

I think the evidence is overwhelming—and I know I only have about a minute and a half here—but again, the people of Ontario want this legislation passed. The doctors, the nurses, the people in the health care field support this particular legislation.

Frankly, I don't buy the pseudo-apology argument that we'll have all kinds of apologies that are insincere. The reality is this: This does not preclude anybody from taking legal action in a court to seek a remedy that they would otherwise be able to seek, regardless of whether or not this is passed, so that doesn't change at all in any way. They can still continue to seek that remedy. The individual will know whether the apology was given sincerely, and they can decide whether they accept that

apology. That's up to them. That's not for us to decide. We can't legislate sincerity here at Queen's Park, and people know that.

But the reality is that the patients, the doctors, the nurses, the legal community, the hospital community and the public want this piece of legislation passed because they know it has tremendous benefit, both to the citizens in this province and to the health care professionals.

The legal system will work, and we're not amending that. This has no bearing on criminal proceedings, and it still allows the ability for an individual to seek that remedy in a court.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: Let me first begin by offering my congratulations to the member from Sault Ste. Marie for bringing this legislation forward and using his private member's time in a very productive way, as it turns out, which has led here to the Attorney General introducing this legislation with the support of his parliamentary assistant, the member from Willowdale, so congratulations to them on that.

I've listened to this with some interest, and I congratulate the member from the official opposition for her comments.

I sat here with some interest as well today listening to the commentary by the third party and their commitment to opposing this legislation. I was listening as carefully as I could to try and gain some understanding as to why it was that they were going to be voting in opposition to this bill at third reading, as they have articulated here today.

The reason that's coming forward that they're apparently concerned with is that they feel that somehow, when this legislation passes, an aggrieved victim or party in any type of an incident—a medical suit, a medical incident or a traffic accident—might somehow be put at greater risk of not being in a position of gaining some sort of compensation for whatever it is that may have happened to them. But as has just been articulated, that is not at all the case.

Whether an apology is sincere or insincere has absolutely nothing to do with the ability of an aggrieved party to move forward with a lawsuit if that is their intention do that. That has been clearly articulated here, and all the patients' rights groups in the province are supporting the legislation, Bill 108, that's before us today, as well as the doctors' groups.

I guess we're looking forward to the vote at third reading to see if, perhaps, the members of the third party will come around on this particular legislation. I know that I, along with members on this side of the House, are very interested in their position on this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I, too, want to add my voice in support of this. In a past life, I was chair of a hospital board. Certainly I know, when the member talks

about the submission of the nurses, how nurses build relationships with the patients and with their families.

When things go wrong, a lot of times a lot of families don't always necessarily feel that a lawsuit is going to remedy anything or is going to bring back their loved one, but what they want is someone to recognize that something did go wrong, and they need to know that someone recognizes that something went wrong. That's part of that building of relationships that goes on between nurses and goes on with doctors and all health care professionals. It's important for them to be able to do that.

Like I said, in my own role there, we often had families who came to the board to try to see if there was a way that they could find out from someone what had happened, but everybody—as the nurses say, there's this silence that suddenly happens, and everybody feels that they're afraid to say anything because there's a potential for a lawsuit. Not everybody really wants to sue anyone, but some people still would like to have some recognition. I think an apology is a way for these families to feel that someone recognizes that something did go wrong.

Without this mechanism, the culture of silence is going to continue, because there will be that concern that there's a potential of a lawsuit and there's an admission of guilt. So in order to allow these families the right to feel that at least something has been recognized on their behalf, we need to have this kind of thing go forward. It's about time. Personally, I think it's long overdue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

I'll return to the member for Whitby—Oshawa, who has two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I would like to thank the members from Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay—Atikokan and Lambton—Kent—Middlesex for their comments.

In my past life as a lawyer, I was also involved with civil litigation, so I certainly am well aware of the concerns that people have expressed when they used to come into the office to say that they wanted to have justice done. It wasn't necessarily about getting a monetary award, but they wanted to have someone recognize that some harm had been done to them and to say that they were sorry, to express regret. So I think that is a very sincere motivation, and I think that is the basis upon which we are certainly prepared to support this legislation, because if it can foster that kind of reconciliation, that is a good thing for society.

But on the other hand—and this is where my concern still comes in—I think we need to make sure that there's still a possibility for these kinds of meritorious lawsuits to come forward, that they are not dampened by this legislation, that people do feel that there is a culture in which they can bring them forward, notwithstanding an apology having been granted, because an apology isn't going to suffice in certain situations. We have to really follow this, monitor how this legislation proceeds, what the actual effect is in our courts, and whether, on balance,

this is allowing the types of lawsuits to proceed that should be proceeding and satisfying the concerns of people who don't necessarily want or aren't seeking a monetary award.

On balance, I'm in favour of it.

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There's also the issue of the cost of litigation now. It's prohibitive for many people to commence lawsuits of this nature, particularly a medical malpractice action.

So I hope that some good can come of it—if there is an apology, that that will go some way, anyway, to alleviating people's concerns.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), changes have been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Craitor assumes ballot item number 9 and Mr. Delaney assumes ballot item number 77, and Mr. Hardeman assumes ballot item number 3 and Mr. Barrett assumes ballot item number 30 on the list drawn on January 28, 2009.

Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Bogus argument after bogus argument after bogus argument, and arguments that are so ill-informed about the state of the law as it exists in this province. This is an act, this is legislation, that will exclude relevant and probative evidence from being admitted into evidence in civil litigation, pure and simple.

New Democrats from the outset agreed with the proposition that a mere apology should not, in and of itself, be accepted as evidence of liability. Here's an illustration. I see you, Speaker, lying in an intersection with both your legs broken, on the asphalt, and I come upon you and I lean over to you and say, "My God, I'm sorry." That's not evidence of liability. In fact, it shouldn't be admitted as evidence of liability, because I can be truly sympathetic to your plight even though I may have had nothing to do with it. If we express regrets, as we do in our daily social intercourse, about someone's loss of a loved one—"I'm sorry your grandma died"—of course it doesn't mean you had anything to do with grandma's death, does it? If you tell people that you're sorry that their car was stolen—"I'm sorry to hear that. I truly am sorry"—it doesn't mean you stole their car.

So it's entirely appropriate for legislation to reflect the observation that the dangers in admitting an apology—that it could be misinterpreted, a pure apology, as somehow an admission of guilt—make it logical to exclude apologies from evidence. Indeed, the biggest chunk of American jurisdictions that have enacted apology legislation have in fact understood that precise point. The majority of American jurisdictions exclude the apology from evidence as any evidence of liability. I don't quarrel with that. In fact, I suspect that most, if not all, judges here in the province of Ontario would make it clear that they did not consider evidence that somebody apologized, the defendant apologized, as evidence of anything other than that they felt sorry about the plight of a victim.

The province of Ontario, the government of this province, has been hoodwinked. It's been shanghaied by the big insurance companies, by the Canadian Medical Protective Association—that's the doctors' insurance companies—and by the Ontario Hospital Association, because they have a huge interest in making it more and more difficult for people who have been injured seriously in the health care system. They have a strong interest in making sure that those people don't collect any monetary settlement, and if they do manage to reach the point, and it's the rare one—anybody here who has any familiarity with medical malpractice actions, especially in Ontario and Canada, knows that there are very few lawyers doing it. It's a highly specialized field, and more clients are told, "Look, maybe you should just try to work out a settlement rather than litigate," because the Canadian Medical Protective Association has a hard-core, absolute policy to never settle: "Take them into court." They've got deep pockets and they will go to almost any length and use any ruse, any tactic, as would most insurance companies, to avoid being found liable.

This is driven by the insurance lobby. The insurance lobby is no friend of innocent victims. You know that. The New Democrats say it's perfectly appropriate to exclude an apology, an expression of sympathy. That's logical, that makes sense, but that's not just what this bill does. This bill does something far, far more than that, and something that is, in and of itself, very, very dangerous to justice for victims, because this bill turns black into white because the word "apology" is tossed—of course, the prospect of an apology is oh, so warm and fuzzy. Any of us who have ever been in a relationship, at least if we maintain that relationship, have apologized frequently and early. We learn to do it earlier and earlier and oftener and oftener. Apologies help to cement relationships. You're more likely to apologize to your partner, to your spouse, than you are to a stranger, quite frankly, except as a courtesy. We apologize to strangers, again, in the course of social activity. During the course of the day you bump into somebody in the elevator and you say, "I'm sorry."

Indeed, back somewhere around 1970, some of you were so young, and some of you weren't even born yet, that Ali MacGraw stared into Ryan O'Neal's eyes and said, "Love means never having to say you're sorry." The apology was the focal point of that schlocky romantic comedy that Mr. Bartolucci's girlfriend probably forced him to go see at the theatre—now his wife. "Love means never having to say you're sorry," and the apology was intertwined with this romanticism. It's become part of our culture.

This debate prompted me to reflect on the phrase, "Never apologize; never explain." It was interesting, because I think it was in a 1944 movie, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, that John Wayne said, "Never apologize and never explain—it's a sign of weakness." That became a catch phrase for people of that 1940s generation. People have commented to me, "My dad used to say that all the time." Unfortunately for John Wayne, this wasn't the

first utterance of the phrase, because we heard it often. I had heard it attributed—in fact John Robert Colombo's dictionary about Canadian phrases and Canadian quotes attributes to Nellie McClung, "Never retreat, never explain, never apologize—get the thing done and let them howl." Again, that has some currency for social activists, I suppose, and people who are taking on battles.

But it appears that it wasn't even quite Nellie McClung who coined that. "Never apologize, never explain" has had some history. In 1919, John Arbuthnot Fisher in a letter to the *Times* of London: "Never contradict. Never explain. Never apologize. Those are the secrets of a happy life."

And yet even earlier, in 1916, in Edwin Milton Royle's novel *Peace and Quiet: A Novel*, old Dr. Jowett of Oxford said, "Never apologize, never explain. Get it over with and let them howl." There are some who will find that little bit of trivia of interest. I assure them I've used the best possible references to obtain the sources and dates. I hope they find that valuable the next time they sit down and play *Trivial Pursuit*, because what we're doing here is far from trivial. This government is turning black into white, and it talks about apologies: "People will be allowed to make apologies." People are always allowed to make apologies—always are, always have been and always will.

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An apology shouldn't be a sign of liability or culpability; a mere apology shouldn't be. "I'm sorry your dog died," should not be construed in any way, shape or form as an indicator that I killed your dog, unless I'm saying that as I'm looking at the front bumper of my car with dog fur all over it. Broken dog bones on the asphalt puts it into a little bit of a different situation, but I suppose in that instance, the apology wouldn't be the most effective evidence; the facts as they stand would speak for themselves.

This bill excludes from evidence the apology, but it also excludes from evidence clear admissions of liability, admissions of culpability—admissions of guilt, if you will. The law in Ontario is already very clear: Anything said in the course of a settlement effort after a cause of action has commenced, after a lawsuit has been commenced, after the writ has been filed and served, after the plaintiff, the victim, has initiated the action, any discussion, written or otherwise, between the parties or their lawyers in the context of a settlement exercise, is excluded from evidence. It's called "privileged" and it's called "without prejudice." It has been the law for a long, long time, and its rationale is to permit people to settle lawsuits, to settle legal actions, and, to be perfectly candid, in the course of doing it—

Mr. Paul Miller: Discoveries.

Mr. Peter Kormos: —because, like Mr. Miller says, due to the course of, amongst other things, discoveries.

The law is clear: Anything said, including apologies—never mind admissions of guilt or admissions of liability—is excluded from evidence because it's privileged communication. It cannot be introduced into court. In the

course of a settlement discussion, you could admit to pulling the trigger, to shooting the gun five times and then to dancing on the corpse, and in a civil action, that admission would not be admissible against you—not that any of you would do such a thing.

In the course of mediation, where a mediator is used to try to resolve the differences as a part of alternative dispute resolution, the law is very, very clear. First of all, not only is that a settlement exercise and privilege by virtue of the law of privilege, but it has been codified in the Ontario Civil Practice. It's the law on civil actions of Ontario, rule 24.1.14: "All communications at a mediation session and the mediator's notes and records shall be deemed to be without prejudice settlement discussions."

The law is already clear: Any admission of liability—never mind just apology—made in a mediation is privileged. It can't be admitted into evidence. Again, the reason for that is so that people can more readily sit down and hash out their differences.

So where would this little exclusionary rule, this sly, clever little bit of legislation, take effect? After actions are commenced, people are, as they say on *Law and Order*—you guys watch *Law and Order* on television at night? The cops always say, "The guy's lawyered up. He's got himself a lawyer." It implies that he's not going to talk to the police anymore if they're interviewing him. But by the time a matter has gone to a civil action, people have lawyers, and their lawyers are going to tell them, "Don't make any admissions unless I'm there and it's in the course of a settlement conference so that it's privileged." It simply ain't going to happen. But if it does happen in a settlement conference, it still is, currently, without this legislation, privileged and exempt from admissibility as evidence.

We all know that the spontaneous utterance, as close as possible to the event itself, is likely to be the more candid one, the more honest one, the one that's less likely to be scripted and the most likely to be accurate and truthful. What this bill says is that if I come upon your broken, smashed body in that intersection after you're attempting to cross the street in a crosswalk, and I bend over you and say, "I'm sorry that both of your legs are broken, and I'm sorry that I was drunk as a skunk and went through the red light while you were trying to cross in the crosswalk at a green light and I ran you over," that admission is excluded from evidence. The most effective and accurate admission of guilt that you could ever find is excluded from evidence.

You could have a rabbi, a priest and an imam standing beside you, listening to that person say that, stone cold sober, each and every one of them, recording on a video-cam the drunk driver admitting his liability, saying, "I was drunk as a skunk; I went through a red light." You could have the rabbi, the imam and the priest—oh, throw in a United Church minister, too; I know there's a whole lot of other faiths, but we haven't got time—standing there videotaping it, and that wouldn't be admissible as evidence as a result of this legislation. What crazy kind

of world are we becoming, where we don't want people to be held accountable for their own conduct?

This legislation, and its support by the insurance industry, is all about people who do wrong things, bad things, protecting themselves from accountability, straight and simple. That's why New Democrats don't support this legislation: bogus, flim-flam, scam. This bill has nothing to do with encouraging apologies. It has everything to do with people avoiding accountability and responsibility for their misconduct.

You know what? If a doctor, as a result of malpractice, leaves you without mobility, paralyzed, let him or her apologize, but then let them pay for your losses. We're not talking about trivial things. We're not talking about a sore back or a sore neck for a couple of days. Litigation in medical malpractice—we're talking about some horrific injuries that as a result of negligence have been visited upon people. We're talking about people left paralyzed, people left voiceless, people left without eyesight, left without hearing. We're talking about children whose lives are forever altered. We're talking about injuries that mean that that kid will never grow up walking and standing up straight; that kid will never be able to hold his or her baby in their arms like other folks can.

I say that when someone commits a wrong that injures another person, that person, that someone who committed the wrong, should be held accountable. We shouldn't be generating or designing devices that reduce the accountability, that reduce the ability of the plaintiff to prove his or her case against them.

I hear it all the time during the course of this debate: "Oh, people can still sue." Of course they can. But you're denying them the single, most valuable piece of evidence, if it happens to be part of the case, a first-party admission of liability. It could be detailed, it could be sentences long: relevant, highly relevant, probative, highly probative evidence being denied an innocent injured victim. There are some folks in this chamber who have been fighting on behalf of innocent victims—and amongst other things, innocent victims of motor vehicle accidents—for far too long. They understand how difficult it is to launch a lawsuit, how expensive it is, and how, once again, the insurance industry and the personal injury insurer, motor vehicle insurers, have got deep pockets.

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You know what happens. First, they'll deny the no-faults. And then, after there's perhaps some process, they'll give the no-faults. And don't forget, in a motor vehicle accident you can't sue anymore for a soft tissue injury, for a neck sprain, even though that can be as painful and disabling for a week, two weeks or three weeks as anything else. You can't sue for that anymore. It doesn't pass the threshold.

You need major, serious injuries to even initiate a lawsuit. So we're talking about people who have lost some ability to earn an income and people who have lost some significant enjoyment of life.

I don't know if Ms. Elliott knows whether they use them up here—I know they use them down in the States in personal injury litigation: They use day-in-the-life films. Do they do them here?

I've seen them. They're effective, powerful things used in the incidence of let's say a quadriplegic—part of the legal team representing the quadriplegic who was mowed down by a drunk driver, to let the jury or the judge know what that's done to this innocent victim. They'll do what they call day-in-the-life films.

It will start with the person waking up, immobile from the neck down. Perhaps the bed is wet. Don't forget, there's no muscle control from the neck down. And the attendants who have to lift him or her out of bed. And maybe they'll include some photos of the healthy young woman or man who was a swimmer, or a skier, or a boxer, or a baseball player before they were mowed down by the drunk driver. And the next scene is the day in the life. And they'll show attendants using cranes to cart that person out of bed. You can't empty your bowels; there has to be a manual evacuation of your bowels if you're a quadriplegic in many instances. You can't feed yourself, can't brush your teeth. You can't comb your hair. Showering or bathing in general is an ordeal. And of course the rest of the day including eating, because, depending upon the nature of the quadriplegia, maybe you can't swallow.

These are the sorts of victims who use the courts in lawsuits in motor vehicle accidents or in medical malpractice. And these are the sorts of people to whom this legislation is denying justice. I find that reprehensible—truly, truly, truly reprehensible.

Look, I've read the scholarly articles, the sociological research on apologies, and there's some brilliant stuff written. I understand that an apology, in and of itself, can be an effective means of an injured party obtaining closure. But this bill is designed for the apology to mitigate and minimize the quantum of damages being paid to that injured victim. The apology that's contemplated here is the contrived apology during the course of let's say a settlement conference or a mediation—which is already protected by law.

Dear, smart, wonderful people from the ADR Institute of Ontario, Heather Swartz and Dr. Barbara Landau: I spoke to both of them on a little conference call on the phone. They were both eager to see this bill passed. They told me about how important the apology was to injured parties.

It's certainly very important in the course of family litigation, isn't it, Ms. Elliott? And hard to come by. But in the course of vigorous family litigation, if a lawyer can get his or her client to apologize, he can probably start things moving along. Those are two parties who know each other, they probably have children with each other, who have to maintain a relationship, who are still going to be parents of children, still going to see each other when one drops the children off at the other's place. But nonetheless, the apology in that context can't be admitted, so they don't need this legislation.

I say to my dear friends in the ADR movement, you don't need this bill to effect apologies during the course of mediation. (1) The rules of practice of the province of Ontario protect that mediation. It's privileged. It's not admissible as evidence. (2) It's done in the course of settlement; it's privileged.

Mediators and alternative dispute resolution practitioners don't need this legislation to protect apologies or even admissions of guilt; insurance companies do.

Interjection: They sure do.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Coming from the opposite side, from my Liberal Counterparts here: they do and they want it.

Let me tell you a story—

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Let me tell you a story. Quiet down, fellas. You had your chance to do 20 minutes over there, pal; you walked away from it.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Oh, come on. These guys are talking nasty and mean now. There's a hostile environment here. Take it outside, guys.

Look, suing an insured driver: First they deny you your no-faults. Then you use a little bit of process and you get the no-faults. Then they cut off your no-faults and you haven't had income for six months, then nine months, a year. You've been paying a lawyer's retainer and you've been paying for the work that he or she has to do. The transcripts of discovery in and of themselves cost a fortune, don't they, Ms. Elliott? The insurance company has deep pockets, so they've got your pockets, my pockets; and the insurance company just waits.

The depression of victims when they're put through these ordeals, the pressure on them, the psychological pressure, it's very much like WSIB victims—I say WSIB “victims.” In the course of having to appeal and appeal WSIB claims—Mr. Miller knows all about that, because he has represented his sisters and brothers in the Steelworkers union. People commit suicide in the course of these things, whether it's WSIB claimants or whether it's people seeking a remedy against an insurance company. You're battered down.

You see, it's not just the good guys who learn about mediation and alternative dispute resolution; the bad guys do, too. You've got yourself a muscle mediator with a bit of an insurance company bent, or who is so hell-bent on settlement because she or he wants to put another notch in their belt—encountered any of those, Ms. Elliott? They want to advertise—oh, they're not supposed to, but they want to say, “I have a 98% settlement rate. I'm a good mediator. Hire me for \$600 an hour.”

I've witnessed these mediations. I know some of these mediators. I know many who are very, very ethical, but I know there are others who are so hell-bent obsessed with settlement, and these are the same ones, of course, that the insurance industry will prefer and try to pick before the others. They will create an incredibly intensive environment, an intense boiler room environment. They'll create a sense of urgency: “Come on, come on, come on. We've got to get this done by 4 o'clock today.” These

mediators will try to make you feel guilty if you don't start making concessions. Of course, you start making concessions and you create some inertia, and before you know it, you've got a mediator telling you, “You know, you probably don't have much of a case at all. Maybe the best thing to do is just wrap it up today, because after all, this has been going on for far too long. That way you can get closure.”

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Then, of course, the coup de grâce is the insurance company spokesman, who has been tutored and counselled, who comes in and says, “You know, Ms. Smith, we're awfully sorry this happened.” Ms. Smith is so emotionally drained that she bursts into tears. The insurance company: “You know, Ms. Smith, we know our driver was at fault.” Her chest is heaving in anticipation. “You know, Ms. Smith, the problem is we don't think you can prove it in court. But just to get this matter resolved, we'll settle today, right now; we'll cut a check for \$15,000 and we'll pay your legal fees.” See, Ms. Smith's legal fees now are \$100,000. At this point, Ms. Smith says, “It's over.” She collapses emotionally, and often-times physically. Anything for this incredible, insane—

Mr. Paul Miller: Torture to the end.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Torture—to escape from this inferno. Ms. Smith's lawyer, of course, is eager to find somebody who is prepared to pay all of her legal fees, \$100,000. Ms. Smith's lawyer, then, who realizes Ms. Smith has no more money for a retainer and can't afford the \$5,000-a-day-plus for a five-day trial anyway—she's going to end up at the courthouse door without a lawyer. How many times have you seen that happen, Mr. Zimmer? More than a few. At that point, Ms. Smith settles for \$15,000 when she has a lifelong injury that will prevent her from ever crocheting, that will prevent her from ever going bowling, that will prevent her from ever shaking her grandkids—you know, you'd hold your grandkids out at arm's length; maybe you're not supposed to do that anymore, maybe I've been politically incorrect, but you take your grandkids and you shake them and they're just happy as all get-out. But Ms. Smith is never going to be able to do that.

You see, that “sorry” is protected by the rules of practice, 24.1.14, but it's an illustration of how the apology, the mea culpa, is the coup de grâce in a mediation process by manipulative participants, by people who know mediation as well as the mediator does, and it's enhanced by mediators who are obsessed with settlement rates. They think it improves their marketability because, after all, it's a tough business to be in. There are very few successful ones, and if you're going to make a decent living at it, and the good ones do, you've got to have a settlement rate, don't you, Mr. Zimmer? That means somebody loses, and almost inevitably it's the innocent victim. So I'm sorry, my friends. This apology obsession doesn't cut it down where I come from.

Like Ed Greenspan said in that column, in the op-ed piece in the Toronto Sun, apologize all you want, but give me the money. Pay up for what I've lost. Pay for your errors. Part of the promotion of the Apology Act

regimes is that it reduces the cost of settlements. It's designed to reduce the cost of settlements. It reduces the cost of litigation. It's designed to reduce the cost of litigation and the volume of litigation. But who's the loser? The innocent victim is the loser; the insurance company is the winner. I don't know about you folks in your ridings, but however romantic the idea of a sincere Mr. Deeds Goes to Washington—who is the fellow in that perpetual Christmas movie, the black-and-white one, where every time the bell rings, an angel sings?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Jimmy Stewart.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Jimmy Stewart in a Frank Capra movie, this sort of, "Oh, I'm sorry"—it's not real-world, friends. And I tell you, the "I did it" by the perpetrator, the most effective, powerful evidence you could obtain—for you to want to be excluded that from evidence during the course of a civil hearing is downright shameful.

But the shame goes beyond that. I darn near swallowed my bubble gum in the committee hearings when the government moved an amendment to this bill. And let me tell you, section 13 of the Limitations Act says that if a—and section 13 only has to do with debt, payment of money, by and large. "If a person acknowledges liability"—oh, an apology with an acknowledgement—"in respect of a claim for payment of a liquidated sum"—an amount owing—"the act or omission on which the claim is based shall be deemed to have taken place on the day on which the acknowledgment was made."

In other words, the limitation period doesn't start running until that date. You can be two years into a limitation period, and then before this amendment, section 13 would say an admission of liability revives the limitation period. The government exempted the parties at fault from that provision, said that an apology or an admission of liability, an apology as defined in the Apology Act, will no longer be subject to section 13. That's interesting. It wants to deny that to the property claims, but it won't extend the same courtesy to the person.

In other words, it says that the apology doesn't kick off the limitation period. If it's on the day before the limitation period, you can apologize, and contrary to section 13, it doesn't kick off the limitation period. That's a very bizarre thing. It protects the special status in section 13. Now, let me make this perfectly clear, because I want to contrast it. In a commercial relationship, bank-debtor, if it weren't for the amendment, section 13 would extend the limitation period. The amendment says no, the Apology Act applies, and it precludes section 13, sets it aside.

So I asked the government spokesperson at the committee. I gave her the illustration of a woman who was a victim of a sexual assault by an unknown predator. I said, "What you mean, then, is that if a rapist apologizes to his victim the day before the limitation period runs out, that wouldn't expand the limitation period." And she had to acknowledge that that's right. Because, you see, a victim of a sexual assault can sue a rapist. So the government wants to protect the interests of banks and finance companies by saying, "Oh, no. Oh, no."

Mr. Dave Levac: Civil versus criminal.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Oh, no. Mr. Levac just said, "Civil versus criminal." This is the most ill-informed debate that I have heard. Rape can be prosecuted, sexual assault, criminally, but it could also be the subject of a lawsuit.

Witness O.J. Simpson and his victim: O.J. Simpson was acquitted of the criminal charges, but the lawsuit provided justice for the family of his wife.

I wish more sexual assault victims would sue their perpetrators and have those judgments. We've talked about that many times. We should have a simplified process whereby a conviction beyond a reasonable doubt of certain things like sexual assault constitutes prima facie evidence of liability, so that there could be a simplified process of filing that conviction in civil court.

Most of these perpetrators may not have a lot of money, but don't tell me that rape is only committed by poor people. Don't tell me that child molestation is only committed by poor people.

This legislation, by excluding the apology, even an apology with an admission, will do a disservice, will hurt, will injure, will further damage victims of sexual assault who may want to seek remedies, as I believe they should, in the civil courts. The government stands up for banks but looks down on victims of sexual assault. Not very impressive.

1700

The bill is going to pass, folks who are interested at all. It didn't get a single inquiry from anybody in the plaintiffs' bar about wanting to appear at the committee. As sure as God made little apples, you're going to get a phone call in your office two years from now, Mr. Zimmer, from some personal injury lawyer who says, "What? The statement recorded by the police officer at the scene of the accident wherein the defendant acknowledged liability isn't admissible?" He's going to say, "What? Because he said, 'I'm sorry'?" You're going to get that phone call.

A cop is at the scene, a drunk driver admits to the cop that he went through the red light, and he says, "I'm awfully sorry about what happened, though." That triggers this bill, doesn't it? It makes the evidence of that cop inadmissible. That's nuts. That's Alice in Wonderland. That's just so perverse. It's just so bizarre. And you're all doing this under the guise of, "Oh, it's so nice to apologize," that apologizing is such a warm and fuzzy sort of thing. You're creating a scheme whereby people who are admitting their liability can walk free without having to make any compensation for the harm that they've inflicted. The law already protects any admissions, any apologies, made in the course of settlement or mediation.

It's an entirely bogus argument to say that we need this legislation before a hospital can apologize to its victim. It's an entirely bogus argument to suggest that a drunk driver needs this legislation to facilitate apologizing to the victim. In the course of a civil action, it's either the negligent hospital or the negligent doctor or the

negligent driver who can apologize and admit guilt with impunity, knowing full well that the evidence is inadmissible against them.

This is designed to exclude one of the most valuable sources of evidence possible. Look, we know that eyewitness evidence is fallible; it most certainly is. It has been seen as gospel by so many for so long, but in fact it has been demonstrated to be one of the most fallible types of evidence.

I say to you once again, we know that an admission—and I'm not talking about an admission that's obtained after a grilling or after a beating that's coerced out of a person; I'm talking about an admission made right then and there, not just the apology. If I see you lying in an intersection all bloodied, I'm going to tell you, "I'm sorry for the plight you're in," and I'm going to call 911—not just an apology, but an admission of the fact that I'm responsible for your injuries, my friend. To exclude that doesn't cut it.

We will be voting against this. The government is accommodating us by assisting us in ensuring a recorded vote. The vote will be deferred until tomorrow after question period, and that's to accommodate the government.

Just because BC did it doesn't make it right, because the same powerful insurance lobbies co-opted other Legislatures than this province. I'm going to stand with innocent victims and with the law. I would encourage my friends, before tomorrow, to maybe read the rules of practice. Go right down to rule 24.1.14. Mr. Zimmer has a copy in his office. Have Mr. Zimmer explain to you the law of privilege. He'll tell you that admissions of liability and apologies in the course of settlement and in the course of mediation are already exempt from admissibility to evidence.

To promote apologies in lieu of compensation is to promote unaccountability by wrongdoers. You might as well stand up and start writing your letters to the new President of United States saying, "Give Conrad Black a pardon," a pardon that even George W. Bush wouldn't give, "because Conrad Black is ready to say he's sorry." That's the kind of justice that's being promoted here today. Conrad Black belongs in that jail cell for a lot longer than he's been sentenced there. The New Democrats can have nothing to do with this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. David Oraziatti: It's a pleasure to provide some comments on the comments from the member for Welland.

I have to say I am very disappointed that the NDP will not be supporting this piece of legislation. This is something that patients and residents in Ontario are calling for, that doctors are calling for, that nurses are calling for. The member likes to say that apologies are acceptable right now and that they're already protected by law. The reality is that a doctor or a nurse is not going to put their livelihood at risk if their insurance provider says, "I'm not going to cover you if you make an apology. I'm not going to protect you." What the member is really saying is that he wants to decide whether or not they get an

apology. He wants to decide whether or not a doctor or a nurse who makes an apology makes it sincerely or not; let's just not have any apologies and continue on our way of clogging up the court system with people who want an apology.

This works in five other jurisdictions in Canada. I haven't seen anybody repeal it yet. It's been working in Massachusetts for over 20 years. It's been working in 35 US jurisdictions. We know that people in Ontario have clearly come out resoundingly in favour of this legislation, yet the member opposite decides to—and I appreciate his theatrics in his discussion and all of his examples. But it's the continued fearmongering about what can go wrong and what possibly could go wrong.

The reality is that residents in this province are calling for this, not insurance companies: Phil Hassen, the director and CEO of the patient institute; Janice Willett, a doctor who has told me that other physicians in this province want that ability; Doris Grinspun, who said that nurses want that ability to make an apology. This does not preclude in any way an individual from pursuing what they are legally entitled to in a court of law in this province. It doesn't change anything in that regard, and to suggest otherwise, that someone will not get a remedy that they're entitled to, is completely wrong.

I know my community is going to be very disappointed to know that the NDP is not supporting this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

You've got to be in your seat. I'm very pleased to recognize the member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd just like to rise today and thank the member for Welland. I guess 20 years in this House, a trained lawyer in more than one discipline in law, would mean something. What it means is that Mr. Kormos, the member for Welland, did his homework. Mr. Kormos read his law books. Mr. Kormos brought his answers and his concerns to this House. It's easy to say that certain groups are in favour of it, but those people are not lawyers who have studied law and know what goes on in a courtroom. That member stands up and says, "This organization did this; this organization wants that." They are not trained lawyers.

So I'm saying to you, Mr. Speaker, that this member for Sault Ste. Marie brings the entire party into the discussion because that's his only defence. That side of the House continually goes back 15 years to blame a party for something that happened 20 years ago. They do that because they don't have answers. They're catering to insurance companies and they're catering to special-interest groups. The bottom line is, if you want a comprehensive bill, if you want a bill that protects the victims, if you want a bill that protects everyone—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Please take your seat. I would ask the House to come to order. You've still got some time on the clock, if you wish to use it. I'm just trying to call the House to order so that I can hear what you're saying. I'll give you some addi-

tional time. I would ask the government members to please allow the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek to make his remarks.

Mr. Paul Miller: In closing, I can say that the NDP did their homework. The NDP looked at this bill inside out at committee level, unlike my bills that went to committee that they didn't even read, didn't even look at and they voted down. That's how they operate over there. It's a disgrace.

1710

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? I'll return to the member for Welland, who has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I opened by expressing my regret about how this was the most ill-informed discussion that's taken place here in a long time. The state of Massachusetts exempts statements of sympathy but not expressions of liability. Expressions of liability are admitted at evidence, just like in Missouri, just like in Montana, where an apology is exempted but admissions of liability are admitted as relevant and probative evidence. The statements of sympathy, in the vast majority of American jurisdictions, are the only things that are exempt from admission as evidence.

It was Wittgenstein—Mr. Zimmer knows this—who said that whereof one does not know, thereof one should remain silent. It's remarkable that the author of the private member's bill would choose to misstate and distort in the manner that I've just illustrated. You haven't done your research. You haven't done your homework. And you're in the back pocket of the insurance industry, which persecutes innocent accident victims.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I do have to caution the member for Welland with respect to his language and ensure that it is within the bounds of parliamentary discussion.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you, Speaker. This bill is all about protecting insurance company interests. The opening declaration, that it's about reducing the quantum of settlements, means that it's about saving the insurance industry money, and it's about protecting wrongdoers from full responsibility and accountability for their misconduct, their negligence and their misdeeds. New Democrats oppose that type of policy position.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I seek consent that today's adjournment debate take place immediately—

Mr. Mike Colle: Not yet.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Not yet? Not yet.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I gather that the Minister of Government Services is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow the adjournment debate to take place immediately following the conclusion of consideration of Bill 108. Is that correct?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: That's correct, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is there consent to allow the adjournment debate to take place right after the conclusion of Bill 108?

Mr. Peter Kormos: On today's occasion, yes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Agreed. Further debate?

Mr. Bentley has moved third reading of Bill 108, An Act respecting apologies. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

I wish to inform the House that I have received a deferral notice. The vote on Bill 108 at third reading will be deferred until tomorrow at the time of deferred votes.

Third reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

SMALL BUSINESS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given, I believe, last Thursday by the minister of consumer and commercial relations. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister may reply for up to five minutes. I recognize the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to question the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services again.

Last week I questioned the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services to ask how he can support small business in this province. He continues to support legislation that imposes increased regulatory burdens on small businesses. This is an important question, so I hope the minister will have a thoughtful answer.

Small businesses are struggling in this province for two reasons. First of all, the global economic crisis, but secondly it's because the McGuinty government continues to introduce legislation that adds red tape to small business. Small business is already suffocating, and your government is making it more difficult for them to compete in this economic climate.

You claim that your government is reducing red tape, but let's look at what's really going on. Your government keeps adding legislation that threatens small business: bills like the mandatory WSIB coverage bill that's going to add \$11,000 in costs for the small construction companies; the pesticide ban, which has created all kinds of uncertainty for lawn care companies that don't know what to do with their past supplies, don't know how to plan for this year because you haven't agreed, so far, to phasing in the legislation. It also creates uncertainty for golf courses, which have to hold public meetings that don't serve any useful purpose; and your latest bill, your

Bill 139, the temporary help agencies bill. These are all different pieces of legislation that tackle different issues, but they all have something in common: They add red tape and regulations for small business—lots of it.

The new regulations are far too overwhelming for small business to bear in today's economy. They may have greater intended benefits, but introducing and supporting this legislation at a time when small businesses are hurting is making it harder and harder to survive in this province.

We all understand the impact that the global economy is having on this province, but that has nothing to do with all the new rules and new regulations your government is introducing. As the Minister of Small Business, why aren't you doing more for small business? Bring reason to the new legislation and change the culture within key ministries, like labour and finance, so that they help small business instead of looking for heavy-handed ways to shut businesses down or charge or fine them.

Let's look at your most recent piece of legislation, Bill 139, the temp help agencies bill. If ever there was a time where we needed these temporary help agencies, it's now, and your Bill 139 is creating more red tape, more bureaucracy, making it more difficult for these businesses to stay in business. It's at a time when we have a weak economy, when people need jobs, when people need the benefit of these temporary agencies. Often, people will work more than one job. They'll work for a temp agency as well as at another job. It's a great opportunity for those people to find permanent work. It's a great opportunity for the businesses in this uncertain economy, where they aren't certain of their orders, to be able to hire staff as they get more orders to provide that flexibility. But you're creating more rules, more costs.

I received an e-mail from Steve Daynes at the Staffing Connection. He says, "These additional costs have made some of our clients question the benefits of using an agency for the purpose of filling their peak demands and the recruitment of full-time employees. Why would they use an agency if it will cost them so much?" There are too many small businesses like the Staffing Connection that cannot stand to suffer any more than they already have. I want to know how the minister can support this type of legislation if he's truly committed to supporting small business in this province.

You can't control what is happening south of the border and around the world but, Minister, you can control and influence how small business is treated in this province. It is time for the minister to stand up for small business in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services has the opportunity to respond.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Actually, I want to thank the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka for asking this question. I said in my response last Thursday that small businesses are very important to this province: 99% of all businesses fall into the small and medium-sized business category, they generate about \$250 billion worth of activity for our province, and more than 50% of all

employment is generated by this group of SMEs. So this group is really, really important to us, and I think that's why we are taking a very balanced approach with any legislation that we bring forward.

I want to talk about some of the legislation that the member talked about. The temporary help agencies bill, Bill 139, actually is not passed yet. It has gone through two readings. It's in front of committee. I really want to encourage the member to present his views and say what needs to be changed in this legislation. He is the House leader for the PC Party and he knows that this is the place where he should be making points on what needs to be done with this legislation. I have actually checked in Hansard all the comments he has made so far and I don't see one good suggestion that he put forward that needs to be introduced.

Having said that, I want to talk about some of the things that our government actually has done to make life easier for small businesses in terms of the rules and regulations. First of all, I want to talk about the cap-and-trade regulations. This is a concept that we have introduced where if any minister wants to bring a new regulation forward that affects small businesses, he or she has to do two things: First, they have to justify why they're bringing in the rule and regulation for small businesses. The second thing they have to do is, if they do need to bring in a new regulation, which you might need to at a certain point in time, then what you need to do is bring too what you will offset in order to eliminate the rules and regulations for small businesses. I think that is a step in the right direction.

Last week, the Premier talked about the open-for-business concept and strategy. Under that, in the next two years we will be eliminating 25% of the regulations. We will also be introducing a 1-800 number which will provide businesses with a single contact for government information. Instead of calling 12 places, you have to call one number. The third thing we will be doing is, if you have a federal business number, then we will be using that for our Ministry of Revenue and Ministry of Labour.

These are the right changes that we have made. Not only that; I want to say that the Small Business Agency of Ontario, which is part of my ministry—actually, we have worked very hard in the last two years to reduce paper by 24% in seven key ministries in the first phase and 25.6% in the next eight ministries in the second phase, and we're working on the next 10 ministries.

In addition to that, we have moved ahead with harmonizing the corporate income tax, and we are now looking at harmonizing the GST and the PST in this province.

I think those are all very good measures that we have taken in order to facilitate and make it easier for small business to operate in this province. Not only this, but we also have brought in really relevant programs for small business to succeed in business. There are 57 enterprise centres and 12 advisory groups that are all keen to help small businesses whenever they need help.

The points that the member has raised are good points, but he also needs to consider what we have done for

small businesses. I think that's where sometimes, just because we are sitting on different sides in the House, you always need to criticize. But I think sometimes you need to also recognize what has been done for small businesses. We recognize that small businesses are really important and we are absolutely committed in our government to make sure that small businesses stay the backbone of this province and thrive and keep adding to the economic well-being of this province.

I want to thank the member for raising this issue. I also want to thank him for the tone in which he asked the question as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): There being no further business, I deem that the motion to adjourn to have been made and carried. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1724.

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Première session, 39^e législature

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Wednesday 11 March 2009

Mercredi 11 mars 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 11 March 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 11 mars 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the non-denominational prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TOBACCO DAMAGES AND HEALTH CARE COSTS RECOVERY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE RECOUVREMENT DU MONTANT DES DOMMAGES ET DU COÛT DES SOINS DE SANTÉ IMPUTABLES AU TABAC

Mr. Bentley moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 155, An Act to permit the Province to recover damages and health care costs incurred because of tobacco related diseases and to make a complementary amendment to the Limitations Act, 2002 / Projet de loi 155, Loi autorisant la province à recouvrer le montant des dommages et du coût des soins de santé engagés en raison des maladies liées au tabac et à apporter une modification complémentaire à la Loi de 2002 sur la prescription des actions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Speaker, I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the MPP from Willowdale, Mr. Zimmer.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this particular piece of legislation, to speak to an issue that affects all Ontarians. The human cost of tobacco-related disease is staggering: 13,000 people every year die from tobacco-related disease; 36 people every single day die from tobacco-related disease. And even those statistics do not begin to speak to the enormous human tragedy of those affected by disease and the families and friends of those affected. The cost in terms of health care alone is \$1.6 billion every year that Ontarians pay to support the health care of those affected by disease.

Today we can't speak to the terrible human tragedy, but this piece of legislation does speak to the recovery of the health care costs that Ontarians are paying out for tobacco-related disease. This legislation provides the foundation so that Ontarians can recover those health care

costs from who we allege have done wrong, those who we allege have contributed to the cost that we are paying; from those who we allege committed acts that encouraged more people to smoke, encouraged the diminution of public health care warnings, encouraged the hiding of research relating to health care warnings and encouraged the consumption of cigarettes that were said to be less dangerous but in fact were not.

Today we provide the foundation that, in fact, was used in the United States more than a decade and a half ago. We'll all remember that in the United States, action was taken by governments at every level against tobacco companies to recover health-care-related costs. We'll all remember that it was the beginning of the Clinton administration when there was a settlement of almost \$245 billion paid for tobacco-related health care costs.

British Columbia and New Brunswick have instituted actions in Canada. Other provinces have passed the type of legislation that we are proposing today, the legislation which provides the foundation for this type of action. So we're not the first. The legislation that we're introducing, that we are debating, is legislation that has been considered by the Supreme Court of Canada and upheld. So we're not blazing new territory here. We are simply asking the Legislature: "Let us do what is right. Let us hold those who we allege have done wrong accountable. Let us hold them accountable for the wrongs they have done and for the costs they have incurred, and let us return those costs to the people of Ontario, who should not be paying them."

This piece of legislation, as I say, follows the pattern that has been followed elsewhere. It allows the government to sue directly for the harm done to individuals—the government to sue. Although the legislation does not speak to exactly what the cause of action would be against defendants in other provinces, the civil actions that have been launched against tobacco companies include: allegations that those tobacco companies marketed light cigarettes as safer when they were not; allegations that tobacco companies marketed directly to young people and directly to those who don't have the opportunity or the knowledge to make a decision; allegations that tobacco companies knew of research about the harmful effects of tobacco and kept it from the public; and allegations that tobacco companies systematically conspired to undermine the health care warnings about the dangers of tobacco use. We require this legislation to provide the foundation for any lawsuit that we might launch. This legislation does not speak about or of the companies which might be the subject of any litigation, but in other

provinces they include the largest tobacco companies in the country.

Ontario has been a leader in smoking cessation activities. Ontario has been a leader in the legislation it has brought forward to make sure that people are not subject to second-hand smoke, the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. We have been a leader in making sure that people are not targeted with advertising to induce them to smoke more; we have been a leader in making sure that we have legislation to protect young people driving in cars; we have been a leader in initiatives to ensure that people have the tools they need to stop smoking and the information they need about the dangers. We will continue moving in that regard. We will continue to make sure that people know about the dangers, are supported and encouraged, and stop smoking. It is virtually the only product that, when used as directed, can kill—when used as directed.

This is about holding those whom we allege have done harm accountable for the cost they've incurred, and making sure that those who have helped incur the costs actually pay for the costs that they have helped to incur. It is legislation against the backdrop, against the ever-present knowledge, that today, we estimate 36 people will die from health tobacco-related disease, and that in the year, 13,000 will die from tobacco-related disease and countless more will have their lives forever affected by tobacco. Thank you.

0910

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Willowdale. I think he's over there; I can't see, for people standing up in front of you.

Mr. David Zimmer: It's a pleasure for me to speak to Bill 155, the Tobacco Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act, today. This bill would give our government the ability to directly sue tobacco companies so that we can work to recover the health care costs spent on behalf of Ontario taxpayers.

Tobacco use results in many other costs besides those millions and millions of dollars that go to provide health care for the 13,000 Ontarians who die and the thousands more who are afflicted by tobacco-related diseases each year. More than 17% of all deaths in this country result from tobacco-related illnesses. That's almost one in five. Beyond the dollar figure and the statistics is the terrible, terrible toll of losses to families, friends and communities.

Just as the statistics tell only one part of the story about the devastation caused by tobacco-related diseases, Bill 155 is only one part of our government's response to the issue of tobacco use. The McGuinty government has become a national leader in tobacco control initiatives. Through our smoke-free Ontario strategy, which is a vital part of our government's commitment to a healthier Ontario, our government has worked hard to develop effective programs that help curb smoking.

The most recent initiative in this ongoing series is, as you know, the banning of smoking in cars when children under 16 are present. I'm sure not everyone here is aware, but studies say that a person at only 50 centimetres distance from a burning cigarette inhales 10 times more carboxylic compounds than do smokers themselves—that's the chemical compound in the tobacco smoke—and that smoke in a restricted car can be up to 27 times more concentrated than it would be outside the closed space of that car. We all recognize the importance of keeping our children away from second-hand smoke, and smoke-free Ontario is demonstrating some very, very encouraging results.

Our ban on the public display of tobacco products and on smoking in local coffee shops and restaurants where children congregate after school and where they often work on their essays and on their computers are having a positive impact. Reducing the number of public places where it is permissible to smoke and making information about quitting more readily available are both helping more Ontarians to stop smoking and convincing fewer to start in the first place. There's a lot more to do, and we will continue, as a province and a government, to lead the way in smoking prevention and smoking cessation.

Bill 155 is directed at tobacco companies because it is alleged their misconduct has led members of the public to start using their products and to continue using their products. The taxpayers of Ontario and our health care system have directly borne those costs as a result. As the Attorney General has said, at this time, in this economic climate, we can't go into a lot of detail about what our actions might be if the legislation is passed. But let me speak to events in other jurisdictions that give us some indication of what we might expect, which will help to explain more about our thinking in introducing this proposed legislation.

I'd like to say a bit about the American Master Settlement Agreement that was signed just over a decade ago. This is an initiative that got started because the Attorney General of Mississippi knew of a woman who was dying of heart disease caused by smoking. She had used up all her savings and was being supported by Medicaid. Someone suggested that since Medicaid was paid by the state government, maybe the governor should try to recoup these losses, these expenditures incurred by the state, from the tobacco companies.

Fast forward ahead a decade: By the mid-1980s, four US states had sued tobacco companies for smoke-related health care costs, with Mississippi leading the way. Within four years of the American Master Settlement, the settlement agreement was signed by 50 states and the tobacco industry. The industry agreed to pay more than \$200 billion over a 25-year period for health care costs that resulted from the use of its tobacco products.

Here in Canada, six provinces have now passed health care cost-recovery legislation. The legislation, when tested in the Supreme Court of Canada, was found to be constitutional. Two provinces, British Columbia and New Brunswick, have already initiated their health care cost-recovery litigation. The government of British Columbia is moving forward and has recently won the right to pursue the parent companies of Canadian tobacco companies in the United States. Right now, British Columbia is

seeking the permission of the court to allow it to proceed with its litigation and also allow other provinces to bring health care cost claims against JTI-Macdonald.

We need our proposed Tobacco Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act to be in place in order for Ontario to be involved in these claims. The proposed legislation is about seeking accountability for tobacco-related health care costs. Costs to our health care system are now being borne by Ontario taxpayers because of the alleged misdoing of tobacco companies and their tobacco products. The \$1.6 billion we spend each year on health care here in Ontario for tobacco-related illnesses could fund eight large community hospitals the size of Toronto East General, for example, and that funding would last for a full year.

Our government wants to work towards recovering the costs incurred by taxpayers and our health care system by the use of these tobacco products. That's why we're asking all members, we urge all members of this House, to move forward quickly towards the passage of Bill 155.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I don't think you'll find anyone in the House with a dissenting position for the motive of saving lives and improving our quality of life nor the arguments. Ontario being the largest province, 13 million people, they're late to the table. As we understand, six other provinces have joined the issue of holding accountable the industry, I suppose, in the first sense and, more recently, the individual and their individual responsibilities.

I think what's missing here is clarity. I don't want to be cynical here, but I'm saying that to me this sounds symptomatic of sort of reaching further into your pockets because they have a deficit—it's reported it will be in the billions; maybe \$18 billion, maybe more—and this is a good place for them to get some more money.

0920

But they have a legitimate claim. If this is proven scientifically to be a health risk, they should make it an illegal product. Furthermore, if you look at the record, I think no one has spoken longer or louder than the member for Haldimand-Norfolk, Toby Barrett, who has in his riding a lot of tobacco growers who have, really without any prior notice, been disfranchised—their businesses sort of taken away from them—and as a non-smoker, I would agree. The real point here is that there has to be a transitional fund to bring them into other businesses, and I think we need to address that at the same time.

If there was some direction here on what they're going to do with these health costs that are being avoided, that's a whole other debate. The Minister of Health himself smokes; each individual is born with choices to make. This debate is not going to be swept under the carpet. It's a tax grab by the McGuinty government, in the most cynical sense. If it's the right reason, they should ban it completely.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'll have an opportunity to speak to this bill tomorrow morning, I suspect, but I wanted to say a couple of things for the record. There is no doubt in my mind that smoking kills. I think we all know it. I don't think we need any more evidence of it. I will be supporting this legislation, but I want to simply add that it is a 10-year campaign and, boy, would I love to be a lawyer on this particular case, because a whole lot of lawyers are going to make a whole lot of money. So it will be good for lawyers as well, and maybe they need employment. In this kind of economic crisis, maybe they need work; I don't know. But it is a good bill—there's no doubt about it—and it will take 10 years.

But I want to ask a question of both the minister and the parliamentary assistant. There are things that nag me a little bit in terms of what we're doing with the illegally produced cigarettes that come across the border and the illegal production of cigarettes in our own province. There are a whole lot of young kids still smoking cigarettes, and they are illegal cigarettes; they're found littered in schoolyards across Ontario. I understand the initiatives that both of you are talking about, in terms of what you've done, but I am curious and interested to know what the government has done and/or is doing by way of talking about the illegal production and importation of cigarettes and the illegal production of cigarettes within our own province. I'm interested to know your answer to that particular question.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to add some comments to the leadoff by Minister Bentley and our parliamentary assistant from Willowdale, Mr. Zimmer. They provided a very thorough oversight of this particular piece of legislation which, if passed, would allow the government to sue tobacco companies for alleged wrongdoing and to recover past and ongoing health costs borne by Ontario taxpayers due to tobacco-related illnesses.

The minister pointed out the human cost of smoking: the 13,000 persons per year who die from smoking-related illnesses. He also brought that down to a figure of 36 persons per day. The numbers are staggering. My wife and I are so pleased that our adult children do not smoke—they never have—and we're very thankful for that. It is a habit that is quite difficult for folks to break. The real message is that if you do not start smoking, you don't have to worry about that.

I had a relative who passed away not too long ago. I was told something by a nurse in the hospital that I was not aware of. She said that many smokers actually get stomach cancer. That was something I wasn't aware of. We can see the effects of smoking on the lungs and other parts of one's body, but I was unaware that smoking could cause stomach cancer.

I want to say to the member for Durham, who made a comment about transitional monies, that our government provided transitional funding of some \$50 million to the tobacco industry and the growers in 2004. That was brought in by Minister Steve Peters, so it really was some

time ago that we provided \$50 million in transitional funding.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I'm pleased to comment on the replacement of Bill 155. I believe that this bill misses the mark. I think the concern in Ontario at the present time is the sale of illegal contraband cigarettes.

What is happening—when I walk down streets in my jurisdiction and in Toronto, I see so many young women smoking. When I say “young women,” I'm talking about teenagers. I recall, a very long time ago, when I was a teenager, it would seem that the males and females smoked in almost equal amounts. Today, I don't see that many young men smoking, but I do see legions of young girls on their way to school, smoking.

One of the problems is that, of course, the sale of illegal cigarettes has expanded to such an extent—some put it as high as 50% of tobacco sales in the province of Ontario, and that's unconscionable.

Sure, we're losing enormous amounts of tax dollars that could be used for our hospitals, 80% of which are now underfunded by this government. The matter of money is important, but more important than that is that young people are being subjected to illegal cigarettes in greater and greater numbers. There is absolutely no restriction. The people selling this illegal contraband will sell to two, three—they don't care how old they are. There is absolutely no restriction.

So this bill surely misses. It deals with money; it does not deal with our young children.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Attorney General, you have two minutes to respond.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I'd like to thank the MPPs from Cambridge, Chatham–Kent–Essex, Trinity–Spadina and Durham for their comments.

We're acting on many fronts. We are working on the illegal contraband cigarette issue. We have taken a very strong stand on the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, and the voting record will show who supported and who did not.

But this is about recovering the health care costs, and why wouldn't you want to recover them? If tobacco companies have committed a wrong, why wouldn't you want to recover the costs that are derived from that wrong? Why wouldn't you want to recover those health care costs? Why would you want to leave them in the hands of those who have done wrong? What possible point could there be in leaving health care costs in the hands of those who helped to incur them, if they've done wrong? That is a question people will want to know the answer to: Why would you leave that money with those who have done wrong?

We will continue to work to reduce smoking in the province of Ontario, and I look forward to the support of members of the party opposite who spoke about that. We will continue to push forward with smoke-free initiatives, and I look forward to the support of those in the party opposite on that issue. We will continue to try to reduce smoking in the province of Ontario, and I look forward to

the support of those in the party opposite. I thank the member from Trinity–Spadina for his support.

We will make sure that those who have done wrong to the people of Ontario are accountable for their wrong—\$1.6 billion every year; that's a wrong.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I am very pleased to speak today to Bill 155, the Tobacco Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act, on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus.

This bill would allow the government to sue tobacco companies to recover damages for the costs sustained by our health care system for illness and injury to Ontario citizens by virtue of the use of tobacco products.

It has been suggested, and I understand from some of the comments that have been previously been made, that some people are of the understanding that this can already be done; in fact, it can't. Individuals can attempt to sue tobacco companies for damages as a result of illness or injury. But until this time, the government has not been able to seek damages for the cost to our health care system, so it is important that this bill be passed. We do, of course, support it. We certainly do recognize the health care costs associated with our system, with the ills of smoking, and we want to do whatever can be done in order to both prevent smoking and to recover some of the costs related to it.

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In fact, I should point out that this was raised by the Progressive Conservative government back in 1999, when my colleague the member from Kitchener–Waterloo introduced similar legislation, in those days called Bill 23, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Statute Law Amendment Act, which amended the Health Insurance Act to allow the government to bring such an action independently of any subrogated right of action against a person to recover costs incurred to pay for insured services rendered as a result of the person's negligent or wrongful act or omission; it certainly would have applied to tobacco companies.

The Long-Term Care Act, 1994, was amended in a similar manner to allow the minister to bring an action independently of any subrogated right of action against a person to recover costs incurred to pay for services provided under that act as a result of that person's negligence, wrongful act or omission. Indeed, the trend towards the enactment of this type of legislation has continued for some years since it was first introduced by the PC government in 1999.

Similar legislation, of course, was enacted in British Columbia in 1998, which was the first jurisdiction in both Canada and the Commonwealth to introduce this type of legislation. They were the first to launch a lawsuit against the tobacco industry for the recovery of tobacco-attributable health care costs related to allegations that the industry did not disclose in a timely way what it knew about the effects of these products. The tobacco industry challenged the constitutionality of this legislation; how-

ever, as everyone knows, it was upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada in September 2005.

Since 1998 and the passage of the legislation in British Columbia, similar types of legislation have been passed in five other Canadian provinces, including New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

I should also note that the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control is the first treaty that was negotiated under the auspices of the World Health Organization. It was adopted by the World Health Assembly in May 2003, and was entered into force in February 2005. This convention is an evidence-based treaty that reaffirms the right of all people to the highest standard of health, and Canada signed the treaty in July 2003, which was ratified in November 2004. The convention states, pursuant to article 19, "That for the purposes of tobacco control, the parties shall consider taking legislative action or promoting their existing laws, where necessary, to deal with criminal and civil liability, including compensation where appropriate."

As other speakers have noted, the statistics with respect to the ill effects of tobacco use are startling in Ontario. It is the number one cause of preventable disease and death and accounts for over 13,000 Ontarian deaths per year. It is something that I do commend the government for attempting to do something about by bringing forward this legislation, but the only question that I would raise is, why now? Why, when these other provinces have done this some years ago? Why is the government bringing this legislation forward now? I would suggest that the reason can be found in the 2008 Auditor General's report, because the purpose of part of the audit there was to assess whether the ministry had adequate and cost-effective policies and procedures in place to ensure that the correct amount of tobacco, gasoline and diesel fuel tax is collected and paid to the province in accordance with the law. The conclusion, of course, that the auditor came to was that, "It remains our view that the ministry's current policies, procedures and information technology systems are still inadequate." I would suggest that that is precisely why this matter is being brought forward now; that it is a distraction; it's a diversion; it's an attempt to change the channel away from the fact that the government is failing to collect these tobacco taxes, which account for something like \$500 million of lost revenue to the province of Ontario each and every year; that they're allowing the operation of illegal smoke shacks and sale of illegal cigarettes in the province of Ontario, not just in the illegal smoke shacks but in our communities, from the trunks of cars to young people, as my colleague the member from Cambridge has indicated, onto schoolyards to young girls, to young boys, which is getting them hooked on cigarettes at an early age; and that nothing is being done in order to address that particular issue.

So that's where we have it. This government is simply trying to change the channel to make it look like they are being very proactive with respect to collecting costs

related to our health care system and is failing to collect something which, by all accounts, could be easily collectable if they set their minds to it. But instead, what they've decided to do is to go by way of lawsuits.

I would suggest that this is certainly not a timely or cost-effective way of recovering these lost revenues if that is what the government is really serious about doing, because to commence a lawsuit of this nature requires a lot of work. The Attorney General has indicated that if a lawsuit were going to be commenced—and we're not even really sure whether or not that would happen. We heard something about how in this economy, they're not really sure how they'll proceed with it; they want to have the legislation in place just in case they decided to go ahead with it. So we have the uncertainty about whether a lawsuit would even be commenced in the first place. But if it were to be commenced, the Attorney General has indicated that it would be commenced in-house with lawyers who are presently working for the Ministry of the Attorney General. That may well be the case, but I would suggest that that would certainly not be the way that the lawsuit would be continued or would be ultimately argued once it got to court. Who would be employed would be lawyers out in the private sector, working at very high hourly rates—and there wouldn't be just one of them; there would be many lawyers involved in a lawsuit such as this.

Secondly, it's a complicated type of action; it's not simple litigation. It would require many expert witnesses who need to be paid—and they're paid thousands and thousands of dollars in order to come to testify at trials of this nature—and this would go on for a long period of time. I would suggest there would be hundreds of witnesses, both for the prosecution or for the Attorney General in pursuing this action as well as for the defence. The big tobacco companies of course have deep pockets and would be able to sustain this kind of litigation over a long period of time.

So that's the final part of it: This type of lawsuit would take years and years in order to realize a judgment, whereas if the government were to crack down and try to collect some of these lost tax revenues—which are not insignificant; \$500 million would go a long way to helping our already burdened health care system—I would suggest that a lawsuit is certainly not the way to do it, because I would think, at minimum, you would be looking at at least five years before there would be any kind of judgment.

All of this is assuming that there would be a judgment in favour of the government, and that is by no means a sure thing. We could be pursuing litigation that may or may not have the possibility of a successful outcome. Even if it did have a successful outcome at the end of the day, there's also the issue of recovery. Many people are able to get judgments in various levels of court for whatever amounts of money, but if the defendant doesn't have the funds to satisfy that judgment, if they're judgment-proof, then all is for naught. There's no point in having a judgment if you don't have the ability to collect on it. So

five years from now, whether those big tobacco companies—even if the government could be successful in launching a lawsuit and obtaining a judgment, we have no indication as to whether or not they'd be able to satisfy the judgment.

In conclusion, I would say that it's difficult not to support this legislation; we certainly do support it. But I would say that there are many, many other things that this government could be doing, if they're really serious about getting money back into our health care system and recovering some of the costs associated with tobacco-related illnesses, which would be much more timely and much more cost-effective than the means by which they have chosen to pursue it with this legislation.

0940

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I was listening to my colleague's comments, and I just want to make two points. One, I'm glad that she touched briefly on the issue of illegal cigarettes, because I believe that that has become the major problem in Ontario today, and I want to say a few words about that later.

I think that something almost akin to fraud is happening in Ontario today. People are being told that smoking is on the decrease and that cigarette consumption is on the decrease when in fact all you have to do is make a tour to any city, any town in Ontario and you'll see that smoking continues, but that increasingly, the smoking is the smoking of illegal cigarettes. So I actually think there's a bit of a fraud being committed on the people of Ontario. People are being told smoking is down. Yes, smoking of legally produced cigarettes may be down, but the smoking of illegally produced cigarettes is in fact increasing, and at an incredible rate.

If anyone looked at the two—the smoking of legally produced cigarettes and illegally produced cigarettes—and combined them, I don't think the combination supports the conclusion the government wants to put across that cigarette smoking in the overall is in decline. I think it is wrong to continue to allow that misconception to be promoted to the public in Ontario.

The second point that I think is important is that we need to recognize that lawsuits such as would happen under this bill will take many, many, many years. If anyone is trying to suggest that this bill will have an impact in the next three or five years, it's not going to happen.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm happy to make a few comments on Bill 155, legislation that, if passed, will allow our government to sue tobacco companies for alleged wrongdoing to recover past and ongoing health care costs borne by Ontario taxpayers due to tobacco-related illnesses. I think it's important, once again, to state for the record that British Columbia and New Brunswick have already initiated lawsuits against tobacco companies to recover health care costs, and Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have also passed legislation allowing them to sue.

I'm sure everybody in the Legislative Assembly knows someone who has been touched in one way or another by a loss of life associated with tobacco use. I remember very clearly the loss of my maternal grandfather, just a tremendous, fantastic man whom we all watched suffer and lose his life to lung cancer at a very, very young age as a result of the use of tobacco—a tragic, unfortunate and unnecessary step in the progression of a man's life.

I'm very happy that what we're bringing forward today is once again going to bring a higher profile to the use of tobacco, for all the very wrong reasons. We continue as a next logical step, and that's how I see this legislation, in terms of trying to curb tobacco use.

I can remember not that long ago when you could still smoke a cigarette on an airplane. Can you imagine that? It's about 20 years now since you could run a TV ad. This is all part of what we're trying to do when it comes to a variety of things. Changing cultures is not an easy thing to do. One of the best organizations out there that I love to talk about is MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, who have done a tremendous job over the last 20 or 30 years in terms of changing attitudes around drinking and driving. This legislation today is one more step—what I see as a very logical step—in terms of trying to change the culture around using tobacco in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm always happy to listen to and learn from the member from Whitby—Oshawa. As a practising litigator, she is probably the most qualified person in this House to comment on the appropriateness and enforceability of the law and the response to it. I think that's something that should be paid close attention to.

I want to bring up a couple of sidebar issues here. In the general public, we're hearing the pressure on the federal government to decriminalize marijuana, or pot, use. Now some people treat this as a humorous thing, but I look at it as—just as an observer, of course. The inherent conflict of legitimizing pot is not as bad when we're trying to get rid of cigarettes, which are both smoking. It's a contradiction. But what it looks like is that they want to start to regulate it and tax it.

If you look back in history, it's recorded that George Washington, many years ago in the United States, as the first President, pondered the issue of whether he should plant tobacco or hemp. It was a toss-up between which one was going to become the popular bi-product. That's an historic fact. It's in some of the records of history.

The other thing is the importance of not diminishing or dismissing that alcohol—the previous member from Atikokan mentioned how important the work of MADD is, and it is. Alcohol is a very destructive product as well, which affords the government a lot of revenue. Alcohol causes more havoc than cigarettes. It destroys entire families when inappropriately used.

This is an important debate, but unfortunately, when I heard the Attorney General speak, what I heard him saying was, "We can't wait to get our hands on the money."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Levac: I want to compliment and thank the member for Whitby–Oshawa for starting her presentation off by indicating that the official opposition will be supporting the legislation, indicating that it makes sense to have this enabling legislation to provide the government with the opportunity that other provinces have chosen to take. We know there have been some successes around the world in these types of lawsuits that have made those companies responsible for the health care costs in their areas; they've sued them.

One of the things that I want us to stay focused on is the legislation. When we talk about what the legislation is asking—it's an enabling piece of legislation—what we're saying is, "Would you provide the government with the opportunity to launch a lawsuit against those companies for some of the things they've done in the past?"

I want to remind the members here in the House today that a lot of the companies we're talking about were first professing that there were absolutely no harmful effects whatsoever from smoking. There are people today who are still saying, "You know, there's no science that actually says that second-hand smoke is bad for you. So why don't we just leave that alone?"

I'm saying to you very clearly that that's why I'm glad the member has indicated that her party is going to be supporting the legislation. I'm glad the member has not stood up in her place and said, "You know what, there's really no science about this." I know her enough to know that she would never say that, because there are too many people in this province who are dying from smoke-related illnesses. And the fact is, that's an extreme burden on our system.

The member for Durham likes to get up and throw curves at everybody and throw mystifying statements that there's been no assistance for the farmers who have been running through difficult times. A \$50-million program to assist the exit from tobacco, I think—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Whitby–Oshawa, you have two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I would like to thank the members for Kenora–Rainy River, Thunder Bay–Atikokan, Durham and Brant for their comments.

Just to respond to the comments made by the member for Brant, I certainly do support this type of legislation. I am very much in favour of this type of legislation having been brought forward. In fact, I had a very close family member—my mother, actually—who passed away from lung cancer related to smoking. So I am very much in favour of this legislation.

But I do feel that I need to point out that there are other things I urge the government to do with respect to this scourge: to crack down on the sale of illegal cigarettes, because this is something that is not being addressed by this government. There are millions of dollars in lost tax revenues that are just going down the drain. If

we really want to recover costs to our health care system, we need to do that, not just because of the loss of tax revenue but because some of these illegal cigarettes contain more and more toxic chemicals. Over and above the tobacco, they contain poisonous chemicals—rat poison, rat feces—things that are going to be far more damaging, and will kill far more people who are smoking them, and our young people particularly, than anything in the cigarettes themselves. So I would urge the government to take a serious look at this, to start cracking down on this, for the health and safety of people who are continuing to smoke. We need to continue with smoking cessation products, we need to continue to urge people to stop smoking, but we certainly need to make sure that we deal with what's on the market out there and make sure that those products get off the market, for the consideration of our young people in particular, who are very susceptible to the allure of cigarette smoking. It's still considered by some young people to be cool. We need to continue with our efforts in that regard to make sure that young people realize they're starting down a very wrong path when they start smoking.

0950

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I have a number of things I want to say with reference to Bill 155, the tobacco health care costs recovery bill. Let me say at this time that it's the intention of New Democrats to support this bill. This bill catches Ontario up with a number of other provinces in Canada. It is time that Ontario caught up with a number of other provinces in Canada.

I think we know some of the history of tobacco in Ontario. I was part of a government that introduced the first comprehensive cancer strategy in Ontario and first started to take on the tobacco industry. My colleague, who is our health critic, the member for Nickel Belt, recently launched a private member's bill to ban the sale of single-packaged and flavoured cigarillos, a cigarette of choice for many youth now. It's something that has most recently been quite strongly promoted by the tobacco industry.

I think all of us know the tragic history. It's tragic because five million people lose their lives each year from the use of tobacco. It's tragic because this number will increase to 10 million a year very shortly. Most of us in this room have lost a parent, a friend, a brother, a sister or someone we know from cancer or from tobacco use. We know the physical pain, the emotional suffering and, most of all, the tragic waste of human life.

We all owe it to ourselves, and I think Ontarians, to look seriously not only at this bill but at what is happening today in Ontario in terms of the use of tobacco.

Again, the history of this is tragic because scientists have known for 50 or 60 years that smoking kills, and tobacco companies have known it for 50 or 60 years. Yet, as a society, we have allowed tobacco companies to find various ways of continuing to promote and sell cigarettes as so-called desirable products. We've simply done too

little to stop the kinds of activities engaged in by tobacco companies, and that is part of the reason we have the number of deaths and diseases in their wake. So part of what I want to talk about is the continuing activities of tobacco companies and, hopefully, what this bill might do to address that.

As I said, the scientific literature is everywhere pointing out that for 50 or 60 years we've known the relationship not only between tobacco and cancer, but tobacco and a number of other respiratory diseases that kill or leave people very ill, yet we have continued to allow, in one way or another, the proliferation of tobacco and tobacco products.

With respect to this particular bill, I think it's important to know that British Columbia passed this legislation in two pieces in 1998 and 2000. It was the first province to put in place legislation that would allow governments to sue tobacco companies for health care costs and health care losses. The British Columbia legislation is really based on a decision that was reached in the United States, which essentially holds that you can use the health statistical evidence, and you can make tobacco companies accountable legally on that basis. This bill is modelled after the BC Tobacco Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act. As I say, these acts are important because they give government direct and distinct action against a tobacco manufacturer to recover the cost of health care benefits caused or contributed to by a tobacco-related wrong. It allows government to use population-based epidemiological data to prove that harm has been inflicted by tobacco instead of having to show this for each person separately, which would be effectively impossible.

Tobacco damages acts are important because they reduce the likelihood of behind-closed-doors settlements that the tobacco industry often seeks out. As an example of such a backroom deal, we can point to our own federal government, which reached a settlement in July with tobacco companies for their smuggling operations in the early 1990s. What we know about the early 1990s is that big tobacco companies were in fact running the smuggling operations. It wasn't a few folks who were out there freelancing; big tobacco, the multi-billion dollar tobacco companies, had an organized system of producing cigarettes in Ontario, shipping them to the United States, then smuggling them back into Canada and selling them without paying taxes or any of the other fees and costs associated with it. What we know is that in the deal that was arranged by the federal government in July of this past year, the tobacco companies are only required to pay \$1.2 billion over a number of years. An industry insider said that this amounts to only 25% of the money that one company, Imperial Tobacco, made by smuggling. So it's a backroom deal that essentially lets the tobacco companies off the hook. We don't want to see a similar backroom deal here in Ontario. We shouldn't be letting a tobacco industry that engaged, frankly, in organized crime, an organized system of smuggling cigarettes back into the country and selling them, off lightly.

Similar legislation in the United States has allowed significant claims to be made against tobacco companies. In the United States, under a 50-state settlement, tobacco companies must pay a total of \$250 billion in damages over 25 years. If I may, I think that's what we should be looking at in terms of the kinds of tobacco settlements that are real, because of the damage that has been done.

As I pointed out earlier, Ontario is by no means the first province off the mark with this bill. In fact, all the other provinces except Prince Edward Island, Quebec and Alberta have passed similar legislation. Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia are already there. Ontario is in effect catching up.

I wouldn't want to leave the impression that this bill should be just about money. It shouldn't be just about money. In the United States, the settlements that were achieved under this kind of legislation also resulted in significant non-monetary public health benefits, such as getting rid of Joe Camel, shutting down phoney tobacco company research bodies and putting further restrictions on tobacco advertising.

At the end of the day, I think all of us should recognize that tobacco companies are still reaping billions of dollars in profits from tobacco sales and that they have, for years, intentionally concealed the ill-health effects of tobacco products and actively sought to promote the uptake of smoking among Ontarians, particularly young Ontarians. That's the reality of what we're dealing with.

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I want to return to something I talked about briefly earlier. The government of the day is constantly patting itself on the back and telling Ontarians that smoking rates are declining and constantly telling people across Ontario that there's a very effective strategy and fewer people in Ontario are smoking. If you look at the evidence—and outside independent bodies have looked at the evidence—the evidence tells you that that's horse feathers. If you combine the smoking of legally produced cigarettes with the smoking of illegally produced cigarettes, in fact the smoking rate has actually started to increase once again in Ontario. That is something that I think we need to dwell on here as well.

This legislation will essentially allow governments to go after tobacco corporations that are known out there as tobacco corporations, but what we have as a problem is: What's the government prepared to do to take on the issue of illegally produced cigarettes, where there is no known corporation that attaches its brand name or its corporate logo to the cigarettes produced?

We're seeing today in Ontario an epidemic growth in the sales of illegally produced cigarettes. We're seeing those cigarettes being distributed far and wide in Ontario. It seems to me that if we're really going to take this on and we're really going to address the issue of the damage caused by cigarette smoking, by tobacco consumption—the health care costs—we have to deal not just with those cigarettes that are legally produced by corporations which have a logo and have an address; we have to deal with the illegally produced.

If I could use a comparison, it was well known during the time of Prohibition in the United States that there were some alcohol-producing companies that were distributing their alcohol in the United States during Prohibition. But there were also people who did not have an alcohol corporation so identified who were also distributing alcohol in the United States during Prohibition. It would have been quite phoney if Eliot Ness had only gone after the companies that had a legal address in England or a legal address in Canada in terms of the distribution of alcohol and had ignored Al Capone. Americans would have said, "What a phoney war. What a phoney campaign."

If we look at Ontario today and we look at this bill, the government doesn't seem to have a strategy to take on the producers, the distributors, the sellers of illegal cigarettes. This legislation, as far as we can tell, will only apply effectively to the tobacco companies that self-identify as tobacco companies. The Ontario government seems to be content, if I were to put this in the Prohibition context, to ignore the Al Capones of the world who are producing and distributing illegally. I think there's a huge hole here. So before the McGuinty Liberals pat themselves on the back too much, I hope they will think about that.

I just want to cite again some of why we should be concerned about this glaring hole in the McGuinty Liberals' tobacco strategy, because it's clear that there are limits to what this bill will achieve. As my colleague from the Conservative Party pointed out, lawsuits under this bill against companies which are legally producing cigarettes will not take two years or three years or five years; it will probably take 10 years or more for these kinds of lawsuits. So this bill will not achieve, at any time soon, a lowering of tobacco use, and we need to be aware of that. Lawsuits and cost recovery alone will do little to stop young people from taking up smoking or people from dying from smoking, particularly when we now know that the greatest increase in terms of cigarette consumption in this province is of illegally produced, illegally distributed and illegally sold cigarettes. This legislation isn't going to do anything about this, and the result will be that tobacco products, both legal and illegal, will continue to kill 13,000 Ontarians a year. Smoking will continue to account for 30% of all cancers and 85% of lung cancers. Tobacco use, both legal and illegal, will continue to cost Ontario taxpayers \$6.1 billion in premature death, disability and other factors, and above all, smoking will continue to cause untold human suffering and the loss of our dearest loved ones.

I said earlier that, in fact, smoking rates have not declined in Ontario. At first blush, they look like they have flatlined since 2003. But when you consider the consumption of illegal cigarettes and the epidemic of sales of illegal cigarettes, when you include those in the numbers—and we must, as I say, include those in the numbers—then what you realize is that the rate of smoking amongst Ontarians aged 15 and over has actually increased from 16% of people in 2005 to—groups like the

Canadian Cancer Society are very clear: They're saying government needs to take further action to reverse this increase in tobacco use.

What do we need to do? Well, I think there are a number of steps that could be taken. The government needs to quickly implement Bill 124 to control the sale of cigarillos, which, as I'm sure people are aware, are being promoted, especially amongst young people, trying to get young people hooked on smoking. The government should at least double funding of the smoke-free Ontario strategy to an adequate level. I would argue the government should increase tobacco taxes, which are \$15 a carton less in Ontario than they are in Manitoba, and take swift action to curb the availability of low-priced, illegal tobacco, illegal cigarettes to youth and others.

Now, how do you do that? Well, we should look at what some other provinces have done. For example, Manitoba, New Brunswick and British Columbia have worked out settlements with First Nations and given First Nations the right to collect provincial sales tax on cigarettes through innovative tax treaties. Let's be clear: Some of the problem in terms of illegal cigarettes in Ontario is the production of illegal cigarettes on First Nations. First Nations which either have no other economic base or a very limited economic base find that there's an opportunity here. Ontario should be doing what Manitoba, New Brunswick and British Columbia have done, which is to sit down and negotiate agreements with First Nations whereby First Nations get to collect the provincial sales tax and keep that provincial sales tax for needed initiatives on the First Nation.

British Columbia and Alberta have also developed effective electronic monitoring of sales, which requires store owners to pay tax up front to suppliers. That's something we could be doing in Ontario. There are other measures that are currently under way in some of the other provinces that Ontario ought to be looking at.

So, again, this legislation is good in that it copies what has already been done in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and what has already been done in the United States. But we must recognize that, insofar as it will allow us to take some action against big tobacco corporations, we will not likely see anything effective from that for at least 10 years. That's how long it will take in terms of court actions.

But this legislation, so far as we can see, will do nothing in respect of the epidemic increase in sales of illegal cigarettes, where there is no identifiable corporation which stands behind the brand, no identifiable corporation which distributes and sells. In that sense, there's a very large hole here.

Cheap cigarettes, illegal cigarettes, are often advertised and easily available in most Ontario communities. There's a sense now that about 30% of cigarettes currently being sold in Ontario are produced illegally, so there's 30% of the problem that this government is ignoring right off the bat.

As I indicated, New Democrats, at this juncture at least, are prepared to support this legislation, but we

would like the government to stop telling Ontarians that smoking is on the decrease. In fact, I think government members know that when 30% of the cigarettes sold in Ontario are illegally produced, there is lots of evidence to show that smoking rates are actually on the increase in Ontario. Something has to be done to take action with respect to that aspect of tobacco sales, and something has to be done to address that, as other provinces are already starting to do.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 8(a), this House is recessed until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1012 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm pretty excited today. My mom is up from Nova Scotia with a great family friend of ours. My mother is Virginia MacLeod, from New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, and her friend is Brenda Smith. Brenda is here because she also has a daughter who lives in Ottawa. They thought they'd kill two birds with one stone and come here to the Ontario Legislature, hold Mr. McGuinty to account, and then visit all of their friends and family.

Hon. John Milloy: On behalf of page Jacob Macpherson, I'd like to welcome his entire family here to the Legislature. We are joined by his parents, Andy Macpherson and Susan Fowler; his brother Devlin and sister Quinn; and his grandparents, Ken and Arlene Macpherson and Bill and Betty Fowler. We welcome them all to Queen's Park today.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I don't intend to kill any birds, but I would like to introduce Dessy and Edith Hammill, who are visiting us from PEI. It must be parents' day, because they are the parents of my excellent LA.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I would like to recognize visitors seated in the Speaker's gallery joining us from the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. It's unfortunate that their newly elected MPP, Rick Johnson, could not be here today to welcome them himself, but he is not sworn in yet.

Joining us is the family of today's page captain, Maddie van Warmerdam. I'm pleased to welcome Ann van Warmerdam, Mike van Warmerdam, Jackie van Warmerdam and Elva Adair Murphy. Also joining them are Maddie's grandfather, Jack Murphy, and his wife, June, from my riding of St. Catharines. They are in the Speaker's gallery today.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'd like to introduce two students from York University who are working as interns in the office of Jack Layton, leader of Canada's New Democrats: Alison Hart and Melissa Bruno, who are with us today.

M^{me} France G  linas: It is my pleasure to introduce Adrianna Tetley, executive director of the Association of Ontario Health Centres; Lee McKenna duCharme and

Fran  ois L'Ecuyer, also from this organization; Hazel Stewart, from the public health association; and Stephanie Gordon, who is from the Toronto association for dental care.

I also want to introduce Chrissy Johnson, who is a person who needs treatment; and people from community health centres and the association of dental care of Toronto.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I would also like to welcome David Klooz, the associate commissioner of the Niagara Region Public Health, and Stephanie Gordon, manager of the Niagara Region Public Health dental program, visiting with us today from the Niagara region.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'd like to introduce Yvonne Boers—she's here, I believe—and Ron Boers, the mother and father of page Danielle Boers, from the great riding of Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would like to welcome some guests of mine today from the West Elgin Community Health Centre: Angela Geddes, Cynthia Roodzant, and Chrissy Johnson. Welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PROVINCIAL PURCHASING POLICY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, Premier, I asked your minister responsible for the OLG why a government agency is giving away 22 foreign-made Mercedes-Benzes when GM is on the brink of bankruptcy and thousands of Ontarians are facing the loss of their jobs in the auto industry. His response? He scolded the head of the OLG in a meeting. That's it.

Premier, this is a scandal-plagued agency which is once again clearly lacking in direction and oversight from your minister. Is your minister's response to this latest fiasco good enough for you?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I thought it was the appropriate response to the circumstances. I think it is an opportunity for all of us, both in government and through our extensive government agencies, to be conscious both of the times and of our responsibility to take advantage of Ontario products and Ontario services where that's reasonable for us to do. I think that's the lesson we might draw from this. Unfortunately, the folks at OLG learned this too late, but I'm absolutely convinced that it's not the kind of thing they are going to do again. But, as I say, it's an opportunity for all of us to be conscious of the times and of responsibilities and to seek out Ontario products and Ontario services.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Premier, we've been in this disaster for four years now leading up to it. That answer is not good enough for hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who have lost their jobs; 300,000 people in Ontario have lost their jobs in the manufacturing sector.

It's not good enough for Ontario taxpayers who are being asked by you to support a \$4-billion bailout of GM and Chrysler.

In 2007, there were 138 people at the OLG earning \$100,000, collectively making over \$18 million a year in salaries. Despite all the high-priced help, no one, including the minister responsible for the OLG, thought it was a bad idea to give away 22 foreign-built luxury Mercedes-Benzes when the Ontario auto industry is in crisis and has been for the last three years. Premier, how can you continue to allow this incompetence and shocking lack of oversight by your minister to continue?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not sure there are many people, if any, in Ontario who would agree with the decision taken by OLG executives on this matter of purchasing cars. I think the minister was clear in that regard yesterday and I know we have the full support of the honourable member opposite.

I also think, in fairness, things have improved at the OLG. I'm not saying they are perfect, but there was a report prepared by the Ombudsman and we have addressed the recommendations found within that report. There have been a number of positive steps taken to provide more assurance and more confidence to Ontarians who buy products from the OLG, but obviously there is still more work to be done. I think it's important to acknowledge that we have made some progress when it comes to the OLG.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: That response is an insult to the people of Ontario, to the auto workers who have lost their jobs, to the businesses who have ceased to do business and to the taxpayers of this province.

Seventy-one thousand Ontarians lost their jobs in January alone and thousands more are expected to follow. Ontarians can have no confidence in this Premier's ability to manage the economy when he and his minister are spending \$750,000 on foreign-made cars when that money should be spent here in Ontario. Premier, will you hold your minister responsible for this fiasco, or will you simply let it go like you always do? Will you finally show some leadership on this issue?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can understand why my honourable colleague is trying to say that we made this decision somehow. We did not; execs at OLG did that. Of the 10 executives at OLG, eight are new.

My colleague says he's concerned about the auto sector particularly. He knows we've been working for a long time with the auto sector. In fact, during the course of the past five years, we still remain the number one auto producer in North America. The auto sector is in crisis and we're working with the sector, the CAW, the parts suppliers, the federal government and Washington as well to see what we can do to strengthen this sector. I think what lesson that we can and must draw is: Where we can, let's today, as Ontarians, be conscious of our options. Where it's reasonable for us to do so, let's buy from Ontario.

1040

MEMBER'S ADVERTISING

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Premier. It has come to our attention that plastered across bus shelters in Toronto are ads featuring a full-sized photo of the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure promoting the new energy bill. Premier, I ask you today: Are taxpayers paying for these ads?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: The member, perhaps in her riding, spends that portion of her constituency budget on distributing householders. I do not distribute householders, but instead choose from time to time to use transit shelter ads. These are paid for by my budget from the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which is exactly within all of the rules and regulations and entirely consistent with the way other members spend their resources.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I actually don't do householders, but I think that the Premier knows full well that whether it comes out of the government budget or whether it comes out of an MPP budget, the taxpayers are still paying.

If you take a look at this full-sized ad inside the bus shelters, it features the emblem of the government of Ontario. It is promoting the green energy bill. It leaves the impression that this is a government ad paid for by the government. We know that bus shelters are very expensive to advertise in, costing thousands and thousands of dollars. Premier, is it appropriate during these tough economic times that you would allow a minister to do this type of self-promotion?

Hon. George Smitherman: I believe that the honourable member just asked that all members of the Legislature roll back the budgets that are available to them in their constituency offices.

I'm operating within the rules of the Legislature from the standpoint of those established by the Board of Internal Economy. It's clearly identified in the context of my role as a member of the Ontario Legislature, and it's designed to promote opportunities for individuals to learn more about a fairly substantive matter that is a piece of legislation before this Legislature.

It's not presented in a fashion which is partisan; it is presented in an informative fashion. I hope that it will help to drive people to websites so that they can gain greater insights into the Green Energy Act, and I hope that the honourable member will also choose to spend those resources available to her, consistent with the rules, wisely and with a view toward informing her constituents, as I have done.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Again I would say to the Premier: You were the one who introduced a law where you indicated that there should not be advertising that is

of a partisan nature. You introduced this shortly after you became the Premier. You said that we shouldn't be breaching the spirit of this partisanship political advertising, and yet it appears that that has been done.

I say to you again: This ad appears to violate your own government advertising laws that you introduced. What are you going to do about this shameless self-promotion of this minister who seems to have neglected his duties at the OLG?

Hon. George Smitherman: All I say to the honourable member is that in an urban area, we choose to campaign with information to provide information in a fashion which is different than the honourable member's. In a place where people walk to work and use transit, we determined from time to time that placing information in the context of a bus shelter is a very effective way to get information in the hands of people.

There are no words associated with this advertisement that are partisan words. Information is offered in a tone which is designed to offer people the encouragement to gain more information about an important legislative initiative. People walk to work in urban areas and they take transit in urban areas, and we use this mechanism to put information in their hands and encourage them to learn more about important legislative initiatives.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The question is to the Premier. Imagine coming in to work on a Monday, getting in a full day's work and then going home, and out of the blue you get a call. It's your company telling you not to come in to work tomorrow because your job's not there anymore. That's what happened to 50 workers at Windsor's Aradco and Aramco, award-winning auto parts suppliers. They don't know how the bills are going to get paid next month because more than 50 more auto parts jobs are gone.

It's a story that's playing out in far too many communities across Ontario. Yet, as this government prepares to offer more financial assistance to the auto sector, we have no indication that this assistance is going to come with strings attached; namely, job guarantees.

Will the Premier commit today to the families that rely on those auto sector jobs that financial assistance to the auto sector will definitely be tied to ironclad job guarantees?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to receive the question. I know the member is very concerned about the future of the auto sector, as I think every single member in this Legislature is.

My colleague knows that we've been working for some time now, together with the federal government, with representatives of the auto sector in Ontario, the workers. We've also reached out to parts suppliers, who have a better understanding of the nature of their challenges. In the end, what we're all focused on is keeping as many jobs as we possibly can.

There are discussions that are ongoing, but I think those are focused largely on retaining certain levels of

production here in Ontario. Ultimately, it will be up to the manufacturers and their workers to negotiate the number of jobs, but what we've very much focused on is maintaining our share of production here in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: 10,000 men and women who work at GM are voting today on concessions they've already negotiated with the company. Those concessions include wage freezes, fewer holidays and benefit reductions. These workers are making incredible sacrifices. They're doing everything they can to protect their livelihoods and the hard-earned pensions of the pensioners. They and their families want assurances that their sacrifices are not for naught, that the \$2 billion in auto assistance that is going to come from this government will have long-term job guarantees so that the company doesn't have to come back to them for more.

Why won't this Premier stand in his place today, relieve their worry and provide the assurance that the job guarantees will be there?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I wish I could provide the assurance that the leader of the NDP is seeking on behalf of those families. What assurance I can provide is that we will work as hard as we can, together with all of our partners, to maintain our share of production here in Ontario. We'll do everything we can to move through this as quickly as possible, to have money flow as quickly as possible to help out not just our manufacturers, but our parts suppliers and everybody involved in the complex sector that is auto in Ontario today at the beginning of the 21st century.

Again, what we're focused on, though, is maintaining our share of production. I think that's the most significant achievement that we can reach for. It's not so much a specific number of jobs but, rather, our share of production. Job numbers are to be negotiated, then, between management and labour.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Steve Chinn, a laid-off truck plant worker, said this: "We are frustrated, but as long as we can keep GM running and help the retirees, we have to do this."

Workers like Steve understand what's at stake. Now it's time for the government to stand with them by obtaining long-term job guarantees in exchange for long-term assistance—not like the last time, when \$235 million went to GM and thousands of workers went out the door.

Will the Premier rise today and tell auto families very clearly that any assistance will be tied to long-term job guarantees?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, we will work as hard as we can to negotiate the best possible deal for Ontario families. We talk about the auto sector, we talk about the Big Three. I've always said it's not about the Big Three; it's about the big four—400,000 Ontarians and their families that have their futures and their optimism tied up

in the vitality of the sector. We'll do everything we can to nail down as strong an agreement as we possibly can, but I do want to say again that our focus will be on retaining our share of production. Ultimately, the decision as to how many Ontarians will be employed in this sector will be the outcome of negotiations between management and labour.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: With Ontario now losing 70,000 jobs a month, more and more Ontario families are finding it very difficult to afford skyrocketing energy bills. The province needs an approach that combines best practices in energy efficiency and conservation with a real commitment to protecting the most vulnerable in the province. It's time for something that I've labelled "affordable environmentalism." For years now, social activists and energy experts have been advocating for a separate hydro rate for Ontarians who are living in poverty. When will this government finally start protecting these Ontarians and their families from soaring energy costs?

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: At the heart of the Green Energy Act is the desire on the one hand to create more renewable energy and also to create a culture of conservation, so we do agree with some elements of the honourable member's question, certainly, and hope that we can encourage her party's support for that bill. We also agree that there is a necessity to have greater protection in our province from energy prices for low-income Ontarians. Today's column in the *Toronto Star* by Tyler Hamilton is based off some work that the Ontario Energy Board has been doing. They have a report that came out yesterday; I would encourage people to take a look at it.

I think we need to go quite a bit further. We're going to enlist the assistance of the Canadian Council on Social Development to assist us, working with other energy-related stakeholders focused on issues of poverty and energy poverty, to try to develop programs in the province which are an enhancement to those that exist now, and we'll be very much looking forward to working with the third party in developing such proposals.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The 80 advocacy and energy groups that make up the Low-Income Energy Network have proposed a permanent electricity and natural gas rate for those living in poverty. New Democrats strongly believe that such a rate needs to be complemented with an aggressive home retrofit program that is within the financial reach of all Ontarians. That's what affordable environmentalism is all about. Why is the government rejecting the idea of affordable environmentalism?

Hon. George Smitherman: With respect, the honourable member came to the House with her questions written, didn't look at the answer and didn't revise her ques-

tion. We are indeed very, very keen to work with all of you on this issue. In the Green Energy Act, there are provisions related to low-income Ontarians. I said just yesterday that the Ontario Energy Board has released a report, which is some reflection of the fact that they are working on it. The LIEN group is one of those, certainly, that we will be working with going forward, and as I mentioned, we're asking the Canadian Council on Social Development to be of some assistance.

It's one thing to say that these things are a good idea; it's quite another sometimes to know exactly where those who are suffering from energy poverty live, and accordingly, we've got to have great sophistication in being able to tailor these programs and make sure that they get exactly where the need is.

On the issue of retrofits targeted at our lowest-income individuals, I can tell the honourable member as well that programs in this area should be anticipated and we're very happy to work with you on the development of such programs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Launching small pilot programs that aren't even going to start till November just doesn't cut it. Ontario is in the midst right now of a serious economic downturn. Families are scrambling to pay the rent, put food on the table and provide for their kids. We desperately need an affordable energy program that takes in best practices from the environmental movement and combines them with a firm commitment to social justice.

That's why we need a special permanent energy rate for those who are having trouble paying their energy bills right now and it's why we need a home retrofit program that is going to be affordable and accessible to all Ontarians. These are initiatives that should be implemented immediately. In fact, they should already have been implemented by this government in the past. What is the government waiting for?

Hon. George Smitherman: The challenge, as I tried to suggest to the honourable member, is that it's not like, as we stand here, there's a list of who those individuals are. It's very, very easy to say that there should be programs, but it's a separate matter to make sure that the programs are actually effective at targeting the right individuals. Many people living in poverty are doing so in circumstances, however, where their energy bill is embedded in their rent. We have more than a million residences in the province of Ontario that are on bulk metering not related to the individual unit. So it is a somewhat more challenging matter to ensure that we are targeting these resources at exactly the right people. Therefore, we want to make sure that we have good-quality program design, but we're very keen to move forward in the very direction spoken to today by the honourable member and very keen to have any input that she might offer to make sure we develop programs that get to where the need is and are effective. You have constituents, as do I, who are in these kinds of circumstances. I'll be very happy to work with the honourable member.

TAXATION

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. One of the measures that the Minister of Finance is considering for his upcoming budget is harmonization of the federal GST and the provincial PST. In a report released today by Canada's largest independent real estate consulting and advisory firm, Altus Group, they estimate that the cost to homebuyers will be up to \$17,000 of new increased taxes in Ottawa, \$25,000 of new increased taxes on homes in Mississauga and up to \$46,000 of new taxes for new homes in Toronto. Surely the Premier and the Minister of Finance will agree that Ontario's home buyers and our economy cannot withstand that kind of tax increase. Will the Premier undertake today, will he give us assurances, that any changes to tax policy in this province will exclude this harmful effect on home buyers and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're all awaiting eagerly the presentation of the budget inside this chamber shortly. We've had a number of representations made from a number of different business communities, and there are a number who advocate harmonization. But in particular I want to make reference to my colleague's federal cousins, who, in their recent federal budget, said the following: "A single sales tax is the single most important step that provinces with retail sales taxes could take to stimulate new business investment, create jobs and improve Canada's overall tax competitiveness."

I would be pleased to hear from the honourable member opposite as to his party's position. Are they in favour of or against harmonization? I think it would be helpful to us and to Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to respond to the Premier. We are advocating for consumers and we are advocating for an industry. What we're saying is, if in fact the government chooses to proceed with harmonization, there should be the appropriate exclusions for home buyers, for the building industry of homes in this province, to ensure that \$2.4 billion of new taxes are not imposed on Ontario consumers. That is our advice to the Premier and to the Minister of Finance. Now we look forward as to whether the Premier will take our advice.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not really sure what that advice is. I thought they were a little bit more precise in their dissenting opinion for the 2009 pre-budget consultations filed on behalf of the official opposition. They said, "The official opposition calls on this government to heed the call of the federal government and take immediate action to fix Ontario's uncompetitive tax structure." We've got a federal government that's advocating harmonization. They're telling us that they endorse the federal government's position, so I take it that they're in favour of harmonization. I'll pass that along to the Minister of Finance so he takes that advice into account in the preparation of his budget.

PROVINCIAL PURCHASING POLICY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. As thousands of Ontarians lose their jobs in the auto sector, we are constantly reminded of how important that industry is to many individuals and their families throughout our province. With so many jobs at stake, it is the government's job to support the auto industry. In 2009, the ministers' vehicle list outlines the make and model of the vehicles available for use by your ministers. The list includes cars built in Japan and cars built in the United States. Why does this government allow so many of the cars on the ministers' vehicle list to be built other than in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Our acquisition policy, I think the member would know, is pretty clear. Except for alternate fuel and hybrid models, the government of Ontario vehicles governed by this policy shall be restricted and limited to new vehicles that are assembled in North America. Our government buys made-in-Ontario vehicles whenever that is possible. Nearly 80% of the vehicles purchased in the 2008 model year were made in Ontario; that's approximately 1,900 vehicles. This was up from 66% in the 2007 model year. Over 500 new made-in-Ontario vehicles were purchased in May and June of 2008. New 2008 vehicles include 100 new Dodge Caravan vans from the Windsor Chrysler plant; they'll be used to help seniors get to medical appointments. The only exceptions are the hybrid or green vehicles, with only a total of 461 in our fleet.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: We want to know what the government is doing about the vehicle policy list, considering that 15 out of 23 are made outside of Ontario. The issue deals directly with the auto industry, which is so central to our economy. It is up to the government to set an example, particularly at a time when so many Ontarians have lost their jobs in the auto industry.

You are a strong advocate for Buy Ontario. It is time for the government to take the lead and show its support for the Ontario auto industry. When will this government ensure that all cars on the 2009 ministers' vehicle list are built right here in Ontario and in Canada?

1100

Hon. James J. Bradley: I must first of all point out to the member, when he gets into this field, that about 85% of the vehicles produced in Ontario are in fact exported outside of Ontario to the United States, which of course is very positive.

In terms of the procurement policies of the government, as I've mentioned, outside of the hybrid vehicles, we really find that overwhelmingly the majority of vehicles that are purchased are Ontario-made.

Now, I think the member will find that as more of the hybrids are built in the province of Ontario, for instance, he will find even more—

Interjection.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Well, if he wants to hear the answer, he will find even more of them will be built here

in Ontario. But overwhelmingly that is the case, that even though we have a pretty coordinated North American—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

POVERTY

Mr. Phil McNeely: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. At a time when many Ontarians are facing challenges due to economic uncertainty, it's even more important for us to continue the fight against poverty to ensure that everyone in Ontario is at their best.

Two weeks ago, the minister introduced legislation in this House as part of the government's poverty reduction strategy. I was interested to hear the debate on the bill and proud to support it. However, there have been some concerns expressed about a lack of initiatives contained in the legislation and that it does not go as far as Quebec's legislation on poverty reduction does.

Could the minister please address these concerns for the benefit of this House and my constituents of Ottawa-Orléans?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I thank the member for the question and I'm happy to have the opportunity to respond to these concerns.

When we are comparing Ontario's approach to reducing poverty to Quebec's, it's important to note that in Ontario, we released our strategy first. In Quebec, they released their legislation first. Our strategy came first; it is a strategy worth \$1.4 billion a year at full implementation. We also included a specific income target, the first in North America, that will raise the standard of living of all kids living in poverty and see 90,000 lifted out of poverty over five years. Quebec doesn't have that specific income target.

Our legislation, if passed, is about a long-term, ongoing commitment to poverty reduction and goes further than Quebec's in a number of ways. It mandates that future governments maintain a strategy; it mandates that future governments renew the strategy with a new target every five years; it mandates—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I know my constituents will be pleased to hear that Ontario has a plan of action with concrete initiatives and bold ideas. I'm glad to hear that we took a unique made-in-Ontario approach that is supported by our community partners.

The government's poverty reduction strategy is the first in Ontario's history. Not only did other governments not have a plan; some took deliberate steps that reduced opportunities for people to get ahead.

My constituents want to know how this legislation will help to ensure that poverty receives the attention it deserves. Could the minister please explain this?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We think this is the most aggressive legislation of its kind in North America, and possibly the world, because it ensures that future govern-

ments continue to put poverty reduction on the political agenda.

This legislation, if passed, enshrines a long-term commitment. We're taking the important first steps, but we know it's going to take far more than five years to get to where we all want to be. We released our strategy, *Breaking the Cycle*, but we also heard that people living in poverty need to have a continued voice, to participate in the conversation. Our legislation requires that people living in poverty have that ongoing involvement in issues that affect them.

This is important legislation. I do hope that all members from all parties will support this historic—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Rapid growth is one of the greatest challenges in health care today, certainly in Durham region, in my riding of Durham. It stands to reason that an increase in population puts more pressure on hospitals and in fact on all health resources, including ER and doctor shortages. I was shocked to read in an article in *Clarington This Week* that the CEO of the Central East Local Health Integrated Network said she won't be fighting for more funding for growth areas. The CEO, Deborah Hammons, said, "We're not asking for [more] money from the Ministry [of Health] to deal with growth." Meanwhile, Minister, the services in my hospitals are threatened: at Bowmanville, the ER; in Port Perry, obstetrics; and indeed in Uxbridge as well.

Minister, is the provincial policy that LHINs will ignore the needs of growth funding, or has our local health integration network misunderstood the responsibilities of citizens in Durham—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Hon. David Caplan: I can tell you very clearly that it's the policy of this government to recognize the growth pressures for the very first time. I would say to the member that when he had the privilege to serve on this side of the House, growth pressures were not recognized within the province of Ontario when they related to health care funding. It took this Premier and this government, in our last budget, to unveil \$120 million provided to high-growth communities, of which Durham is of course one.

I do recognize the growth pressures there and across many other communities in the province of Ontario. In the budget year 2008-09, \$30 million flowed to the local health integration networks for distribution to meet those growth pressures. That is the first step, and there will be future steps in future budgets to fully allocate the \$120 million that was outlined by Minister Duncan in last year's budget.

I look forward to the supplementary, and I want the member to know that it is our very clear policy to recognize those growth pressures.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: Minister, the article I quote from This Week mentions recent grants to the very hospitals we're discussing. A representative from the Growing Communities Healthcare Alliance is saying that Lakeridge Health, of which I speak, should have received \$3 million of the growth funding allocated in central-east. Tariq Asmi, of the Growing Communities Healthcare Alliance, says that Lakeridge's share of that should have been \$3 million; instead, it was about \$900,000. The CEO of Central East LHIN says her agency won't ask for more money from the ministry. In fact, staff in your ministry office say that there is no more money.

My question then to you, Minister, is, if the Central East LHIN won't stand up for high-growth communities such as mine, will your government step in to ensure that growth funding within the LHIN is distributed in a fair manner? That is all I'm asking for: our fair share of the growth funding.

Hon. David Caplan: When the member had an opportunity to advocate on behalf of hospital corporations within his riding when he was on this side of the House, in fact, he supported a 5.5% cut to hospital budgets. I would say for the member that those cuts were applied fairly across the province; all health care organizations experienced that lack of support and undermining pressures that they were under.

In 2003, that changed significantly. In our most recent budget last year, in fact, growth funding for the very first time was recognized by this government. Now, I acknowledge that there is more to do. We have a long history in this province of not recognizing these pressures. It takes leadership which has the courage to first of all recognize the problem, and to begin to put in place the elements of a plan to do so. We will work with our local health integration networks—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

DENTAL CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Today, the Association of Ontario Health Centres explained why the McGuinty government must keep its promise on oral health. The 2008 budget reads, "The government will be developing a plan to provide dental services to low-income persons." I know that the eligibility for CINOT has been extended from age 14 to 18, but we have yet to see the promised early years screening program or the oral health prevention and treatment program for low-income Ontarians.

When does the Premier intend to provide dental services to low-income persons and flow the promised \$35 million a year?

1110

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health Promotion.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I thank the member opposite for the question. First of all, I'd like to take the opportunity today to welcome the Association of Ontario Health Centres to Queen's Park, and all the health professionals who are in the House today.

Investment in dental care for Ontarians is critical. Our government is committed to improving the oral health of Ontarians and we are moving forward with our commitment. Ontario's children are our priority. That is why our government continues to work to improve the oral health of Ontario's children. That is why we expanded the children in need of treatment program to include children 17 and under.

This is just the first phase. Along with the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: As I mentioned in my first question, we know that CINOT has been expanded, but today MPPs receive postcards from citizens across the province. You can read the facts: Forty-two per cent of people in Ontario have no dental insurance. People who have lost their jobs, families on EI and families on social assistance cannot afford the high cost of dental treatment. People who are in constant pain do not have an affordable place to go.

After the budget announcement, over 30 community health centres and aboriginal health access centres have been in discussion with public health units across the province to plan for this funding. Minister, will the community health centres and the aboriginal access centres have a leading role in the program when the funding finally flows?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Along with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, we are moving forward with a plan that, when fully implemented, will provide \$45 million annually to ensure that low-income Ontarians have access to quality dental care.

As I said before, our youth are our priority. Our government continues to fund public health units to provide critical programs and services to the community. With the expansion of this program—this is just the first step—we expect to double the number of children who will access this service. In 2008, the CINOT program paid for urgent care for over 26,900 children with serious oral health problems who may have otherwise gone untreated. We stand committed to promoting and protecting the oral health of all Ontarians.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. David Oraziotti: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Minister, we're clearly seeing challenging economic times around the world. These challenges are hitting home and touching the lives of northern families and families right across the province of Ontario.

Until recently, the mining industry has seen unprecedented growth, which has been driven by high commodity prices. However, it too is not immune to the current economic climate. Just last week, Vale Inco laid off employees in Sudbury, and in February, Xstrata also laid off employees in Sudbury. Indeed, these are challenging times for the mining industry and for families impacted by job losses.

Minister, I understand that last week the Prospectors and Developers Association international conference was held in Toronto. Could you please tell the House what the mood was like at the conference as we are seeing falling commodity prices around the world?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you very much to the member. Indeed, we are going through challenging times, but last week people from around the mining world came to Toronto and joined together at the Prospectors and Developers Association conference. Despite the economic downturn, I think there's no question that the mood of the conference was very optimistic. In fact, they drew the third-highest attendance in their history: over 18,000 delegates. At our Ontario pavilion alone, our staff spoke to well over 400 delegates and exhibitors looking for mineral investment opportunities in the province of Ontario.

Garry Clark, the executive director of the Ontario Prospectors Association, I think summed it up best. In very positive comments, he said, "We're a pretty optimistic group." Even though commodity "prices aren't good and the economy is not good ... there seems to be a lot of people looking for projects." Ontario clearly remains a leading jurisdiction in Canada and a major player in the mining world. We're very happy about that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. David Oraziotti: Thank you, Minister. It is certainly refreshing to hear that, at the conference, there was positive feedback and that there remains a sense of optimism in Ontario's mining sector.

I understand that at last year's conference there was the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the PDAC and the Assembly of First Nations, which was a historic undertaking that will help industry and First Nations work together on mineral development. Mining and mineral sector activity, especially in northern First Nations and aboriginal communities, is often the only economic development opportunity.

Minister, as mining is playing a major role in the economic development of many First Nations and aboriginal communities and also in light of the fact that we're in the process of modernizing the Mining Act, I'd like to know how the First Nations and aboriginal communities were involved in this year's prospectors' and developers' conference.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Indeed, at this year's conference, First Nation and aboriginal communities were extremely well represented. I was pleased to be able to host a breakfast meeting at PDAC with representatives from a number of First Nation communities. I also had an opportunity to stop by the Matawa First Nation booth on the trade show floor, which was located very close to our Ontario pavilion.

I want to remind the House too that we have a very positive working relationship with many First Nations, including Matawa, which just signed a memorandum of understanding that will see us develop a consultation protocol for mineral exploration and development on their traditional lands. It will ultimately provide greater

certainty and direction for mineral exploration and development there.

This is one example of the type of relationship that our government is working hard to foster between ourselves, aboriginal communities and industry, and a conference like PDAC certainly helps further those relationships.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development. I've gone through the General Motors restructuring plan, as I'm sure you have, that we received in late February. When you look at page 256 and quite a few others, just to mention a few, it specifically states in "restructuring plan highlights": "maintains General Motors Canada Ltd.'s share of Canada-US production, which is expected to range between 17% and 20%."

The Premier, in his response early on, went on to specifically state that, "We will continue to maintain our production share here in Ontario."

Minister, there are a lot of other significant components found within General Motors and the auto sector, whether it's the engineering department, the mechanics there or the other salaried individuals who aren't even mentioned in this proposal. What discussions have you had to ensure that the thousands of salaried workers in Ontario will continue to stay here?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I appreciate the member's question. I know that the member has been a long-time advocate for his community, in particular the matters that he has raised here.

The Premier made reference to production because he was asked about production. Certainly, you've seen General Motors, in their restructuring plan, not only make reference to commitments around production, but they have already made investments around R&D and its engineering centre and the focus and development of green vehicle technology.

I say to the member that we are very focused on keeping the level of production and economic activity out of General Motors in a way that is in the best interests—we're not just fighting on the production front but we're fighting on behalf of all those workers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Minister, just in case you're unaware, the head office lease for General Motors Canada expires next year. The belief is that the individuals who are working at the head office will be relocated to General Motors United States and that there will be a large movement of thousands of employees. Not only that, but for those who are unaware, there have been 160 of the new hydrogen vehicles produced in Oshawa at the engineering department, at a cost of around \$1 million. They are currently operating around the world being tested. The concern there is that these individuals are going to lose their jobs, and the engineering component as well may be relocated outside of Ontario. This will have a substantial impact on those jobs, whether it's the

mechanics working in the engineering department, the engineers or all the other ones.

Minister, can you ensure that the salaried workers, the mechanics, the engineers and every other component will continue on a proportional basis to remain in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The member raises a very interesting point with respect to not only head office and its location but a number of matters involving engineers and other workers who are not necessarily involved in production. It is positive. I know the member would agree that GM did say in its restructuring plan that it will be launching five new vehicles in Oshawa and Ingersoll.

I appreciate what the member is saying with respect to what GM in Oshawa is going to look like at the end of all this. I can say to the member that I think we all know that it's going to be smaller, that the footprint will be smaller. We continue to fight for proportionality with respect to production. As I said before, we continue to fight for all those workers. But I say to the member that I want to work with him very closely to address this and all those issues so that we can ensure that all of those workers in fact are getting the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1120

SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF

Mr. Rosario Marchese: A question to the Minister of Education: The Falconer report, the government's own roots of youth violence report, experts in the field of education, and educators and community workers on the ground all have called for the maintenance and increase of qualified support staff in schools to ensure student success. With the possible firing of teachers, librarians and educational assistants announced at the Toronto District School Board today, it is clear that you are going in a different direction. Education is your responsibility, and Kathleen Wynne the trustee would be screaming bloody murder at these cuts. What will Kathleen Wynne the minister do to stop the possible cuts of 186 educational assistants and teacher-librarians?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Just on the overall issue of support workers in schools, we've increased the number of support staff by approximately 8,600—that's across the province; 8,600 more support workers—despite the fact that there are 90,000 fewer students in our schools. So while enrolment has gone down, not only have we increased the number of teachers, we've increased the number of support workers because we know how important those people are to supporting teachers in the classroom and supporting kids.

I'm very aware of the particular issue that the member raises about education assistants in the Toronto District School Board. When we came into office, class sizes in those kindergarten classrooms, which is where most of those EAs are, were 25, 30, 35 kids. Those class sizes are now under 20, and so the whole policy rationale for those EAs has disappeared.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I say to the minister that reducing classroom support is not a smart economic strategy. Education finance is your responsibility. Teacher-librarians help students to read and education assistants help children to learn. Before you decided on this cost-cutting strategy, did you consider the cost to our children and their future?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We have not settled on a cost-cutting strategy. In fact, since we've been in office we've been increasing funding every year to a school system that is in declining enrolment. There are fewer kids in the system and yet we know that we need to keep putting those resources in: almost 5,000 more education assistants; 780 more custodians; 920 more secretaries; 1,200 more support services staff, which includes lunchroom and yard supervision, library workers and so on; other paraprofessionals, 829—those are teaching assistants and other classroom assistants. On top of that we have included more funding for safe schools, so that includes more psychologists, more social workers and more child and youth workers. Overall, there are more adults in our schools now than there were in 2003, even though there are fewer students.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. You have spoken a number of times in this House about what our government is doing to support affordable housing in Ontario with programs such as the \$100-million investment for social housing repair, the joint affordable housing program with our federal and municipal partners, as well as rental support programs such as the rent bank, which has helped nearly 1,400 people in my community of Ottawa.

Amongst vulnerable groups who need our help for housing, there are those who suffer from a mental illness or are, tragically, victims of domestic violence. Could the minister please tell the House what his ministry is doing to assist these specific vulnerable members of our society to receive the housing they need?

Hon. Jim Watson: Our government, through the affordable housing program, is assisting those individuals who are suffering from mental illness or are victims of domestic violence throughout the province of Ontario, and specifically, the honourable member knows the work we've done in the city of Ottawa. Across Ontario, there are 577 units dedicated to people with mental illness and 443 dedicated to victims of domestic violence. In Ottawa, there are 18 such units that will be built, and in addition to those units, the provincial government is providing rent bank funding to prevent individuals from being evicted from their homes. The city of Ottawa has received \$7 million under our DOOR program, which, again, helps individuals from all walks of life. Finally, we have provided to the city of Ottawa \$2.7 million for rent supplements to help subsidize rent for individuals in our community.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Minister. I'm sure these programs will make a difference in our community of Ottawa and in my riding of Ottawa Centre. But as you know, Ottawa, like many cities and towns across Ontario, is feeling the strain of the economic downturn. Social assistance costs have risen and Ottawa is finally starting to recover from the recent transit strike.

Members of my community want to know how the provincial government is helping them and helping Ottawa to weather this current economic storm, and what concrete steps the province is taking to not only deal with this issue in the short term but make investments that will make a significant difference in the long term.

Hon. Jim Watson: As a result of the signing of an historic agreement last October between the municipal sector and the province of Ontario, after years of dealing with the burden of downloading we are taking that burden away from property taxpayers in communities like the city of Ottawa and we're uploading various costs, such as public health, ambulance costs, the Ontario drug plan, the Ontario disability support program, Ontario Works—also known as welfare—as well as court security and prisoner transportation. Those costs are being removed from the Ottawa property taxpayers' bill and brought back to where they should be: at the province of Ontario.

Just recently, the Minister of Transportation announced that OC Transpo will be receiving over \$36 million in gas tax to help operate the public transit system. In addition, under the Investing in Ontario Act, the city of Ottawa has received over \$77 million for infrastructure in my hometown of Ottawa.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services. Last week, I raised the small-business concerns of a grocer, Ken Ross, in my constituency. On top of the minimum wage increase, Ken has already seen a 35% increase in his hydro bill despite taking all the necessary energy efficiency precautions. Now he has to plan for at least another 30% increase on his \$30,000-a-month electricity bill because of Bill 150 and the tax and power grab.

Minister, Ken Ross and other business owners need to know if you will defend their interests and make sure there are no other hidden costs in the upcoming provincial budget that will prevent small businesses from creating more jobs when we need them most.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: This question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: I'm pleased, one more time, to try and be of assistance to the honourable member in relation to this individual business person that she brings forward. I can confirm that there is nothing in plans that would have the effect that the honourable member is proposing related to increases in electricity costs for this gentleman or for any other.

In fact, as the Green Energy Act moves forward, it will empower local distribution companies, like the excellent one that we have in Ottawa, to work very proactively with businesses like the one that's mentioned to further enhance the energy efficiency opportunities that lie there. The Green Energy Act will not be leading to rates of increase such as those proposed by the honourable member, but it will be leading to more jobs in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question wasn't about the Green Energy Act, or the tax and power grab, as we like to call it on this side. Clearly, the fact that he deferred this question only reflects the control the current Minister of Energy and Infrastructure has put in place on that side.

Small business is the economic engine of Ontario's growth, where the vast majority of new jobs are created. Instead of fostering growth, this government creates obstacles to job creation at every turn. Again I'm going to ask the minister responsible for small business: Has he spoken to the Minister of Finance to ensure that next week's budget will not include any additional costs to doing business in this province, and will he meet with them right away and prove it to this Legislature?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I'm very pleased to answer this question. The member on that side doesn't need to tell me that the small businesses are the engines of this province. We have about 360,000 small businesses who are actually doing quite well in this province, even in spite of the challenges they are facing in this global context. They generate about \$250 billion worth of activity, and 50% of all employment is generated by this.

That is why our government has a very balanced approach to all the legislation that we bring in here. We have the programs that assist small businesses in the challenges they are facing in this global context. We have 57 enterprise centres which are willing to help them at any point in time and we have 12 advisory groups which are willing to help them, but over and above, we have programs that actually greatly assist our small-business communities. I would be more than pleased—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1130

DENTAL CARE

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion. One and a half years ago, the McGuinty Liberals promised emergency dental care for low-income children up to the age of 18. Ken Schabler was laid off from his job at Kenora Forest Products a year ago and no longer has health care benefits for himself or his three teenaged children.

Will the minister explain why the McGuinty government denied emergency dental coverage to the 17-year-old daughter of Mr. Schabler, who applied for emergency

coverage to have her wisdom teeth removed, something that is very necessary?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I'll refer that question to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. David Caplan: I appreciate the member raising the matter here in the Legislature. Obviously, I couldn't know the individual circumstance. If the member would be good enough to forward them to me, I would certainly ask officials to take a look and see what the circumstances are and if there are opportunities to be able to help the constituent that he raises here in the House today. Any member, of course, can raise these matters in this House or with me directly, or with my staff, as they do through the MPP liaison function that I know all ministers' offices have.

We do have a program which is in place to help in times of emergency. It is difficult to be able to comment on an individual case without the context and without any of the information other than what the member has presented in about a 60-second response, but I would undertake to the member to, as quickly as that information is forwarded, get a response to him.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'd be pleased to provide the facts now. When Mr. Schabler's daughter applied, she was a grade 12 student, 17 years of age. After some delay from the Ministry of Health, they responded and said, "Since you have now turned 18, you are denied coverage." This looks very cynical.

My question is this: Will the minister intervene and ensure that this grade 12 teenaged student, who applied for emergency dental coverage when she was 17 years old to do a procedure which is very necessary, receives the coverage, or does the cynical impression in fact represent reality?

Hon. David Caplan: I think it's disappointing that the member opposite would take a cynical approach. I think I indicated in response to the first question which he asked a willingness to take a look at the case if he would bring it forward. Unfortunately, the member has chosen so far not to do so, but I hope that he will, in fact, forward the information either to me or to my office so that we can follow up with his constituent and see what service we could provide. I cannot presuppose what action will ensue, not having had an opportunity to be able to take a look at the specifics of the case. I certainly am willing to take a very open-minded approach and do whatever we can. I do mention to the member that he does know that this kind of protocol has existed, having been a very experienced member in this House. Of course, my office is open to working with him and all members in helping to resolve matters related to constituents.

MEDICAL RESEARCH

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. I understand that in the Kingston Whig-Standard yesterday, Dr. David Lillcrap, a Queen's researcher, said that President Obama's

announcement that he is lifting the ban on funding for stem cell research "may seriously hurt this country's ability to attract good scientists in the future." Dr. Lillcrap said that "'the heart and soul' of stem cell research is operating grants to scientists. He said Canadian scientists won't be able to compete with the US unless the research community receives" support.

In today's Globe and Mail, another article states that many Canadian researchers are concerned about "funding for the basic, curiosity-driven research that history has shown leads to important discoveries." Operating grants are a fundamental part of a great deal of scientific research. What is our government doing to ensure that we don't lose our researchers to the United States?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my colleague for the question. I want to assure all members of the House that our commitment to research, both basic and applied, is as firm as it ever was. There's a commitment of some \$650 million of the taxpayers' money that is spent and is allocated towards our researchers and the type of cutting-edge work that we're doing.

I would give the example of Dr. Anthony Pawson at Lunenfeld Research, who just received the Kyoto prize—the first Canadian scientist to receive that prize. We're particularly proud that that half-million dollars, which came from the Inamori Foundation, has been matched by our government so that Dr. Pawson can attract and retain some of the top young scientists in the world to come to Mount Sinai and be part of his team, which continues each and every day to make biomedical research history. We're so proud of him and all of his 10,000 colleagues here in the province of Ontario. We will continue to support them because truly they are the future.

We acknowledge President Obama, but we will continue to be ahead of the curve when it comes to our American friends and compete for the best talent in the world—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The member from Kitchener–Waterloo on a point of order.

MEMBER'S ADVERTISING

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a point of order. Today in question period, I asked the Premier about the appropriateness of the bus shelter ads in Toronto featuring a full-sized ad and photo of the Minister of Energy which promotes his energy bill. I also asked if this advertising breaches the spirit of the partisan political advertising law that he introduced.

The ad refers to a bill that has not yet passed second reading. In fact, we are debating the bill today. It has not yet gone to committee. The minister himself has acknowledged that he is open to amendments to the bill, and after committee we still have third reading.

This is not just any bill; it is a bill that is attached to his own ministerial responsibilities, and the government has referred to it as a very important bill to them.

There is a ruling on this in federal Parliament. In response to a complaint about the ads by the former Min-

ister of Immigration featuring a bill to amend the Immigration Act that had not yet passed, the federal Speaker ruled that such ads should not be repeated.

This ad gives the impression that it is funded by the government and by taxpayers, and unfortunately, in today's society, perception is reality. As well, the Minister of Energy has used the word "campaign" in one of his responses.

Mr. Speaker, I would respectfully request you review the ad and the minister's response and render a ruling on whether the ad is appropriate for a member of this assembly.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Further to that point—and I don't think the Speaker should put much weight on the minister referring to it as "campaigning"; I'm sure that was an inadvertent use of that word—let me put this to you: If any of us in the opposition, in our householders, were to critique or attack a government policy initiative, especially a piece of government legislation, I'm confident that that would be perceived as partisan content. We are all very careful to avoid that. Our householders are screened by people across the road, and there are penalties, financial ones, for anybody who dares include partisan content.

I suggest that the Speaker might consider Ms. Witmer's point of order in that very context. The minister says it's the equivalent of householders; so be it. But it seems to me that if you're promoting a government policy, as compared to critiquing a government policy—the minister thinks that should be okay. I say both of them constitute partisan activity in what is the equivalent of a householder.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The government House leader.

Hon. George Smitherman: Perhaps I might, on the same point of order, just say that I look forward to any ruling that you—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order.

Hon. George Smitherman: Everybody listened very carefully to these important points. All I want to offer is that the word "proposed" is the second word associated with the presentation. It's designed to offer people the instinct to garner more information. But I would be very willing, obviously, to listen to any recommendations the Speaker might have to offer.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The government House leader.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Just to emphasize that the advertisements do fall within the rules as they say "would" and not "will," and they don't presume passage.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable members for their points. I would say to the member from Kitchener–Waterloo that it really was not a point of order; it was more of a point of privilege. But I will reserve judgment on that and take the opportunity to review the points, along with the comments that were made by the other members.

DEFERRED VOTES

APOLOGY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA PRÉSENTATION D'EXCUSES

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 108, An Act respecting apologies / Projet de loi 108, Loi concernant la présentation d'excuses.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1140 to 1145.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arnott, Ted
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Barrett, Toby
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Best, Margaret
Bradley, James J.
Brotten, Laurel C.
Brown, Michael A.
Bryant, Michael
Caplan, David
Chan, Michael
Chudleigh, Ted
Colle, Mike
Craitor, Kim
Crozier, Bruce
Dickson, Joe
Dombrowsky, Leona
Fonseca, Peter

Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hardeman, Ernie
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Kular, Kuldip
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
MacLeod, Lisa
Mangat, Amrit
Martiniuk, Gerry
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McGuinty, Dalton
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Miller, Norm
Milloy, John

Mitchell, Carol
Munro, Julia
Naqvi, Yasir
O'Toole, John
Oraziatti, David
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Phillips, Gerry
Ramal, Khalil
Sandals, Liz
Savoline, Joyce
Smith, Monique
Smitherman, George
Sousa, Charles
Takhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Witmer, Elizabeth
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

DiNovo, Cheri
Kormos, Peter

Marchese, Rosario
Miller, Paul

Prue, Michael

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 64; the nays are 5.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1149 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ERNIE CROSSLAND

Mr. Frank Klees: I rise today to pay tribute to a great Canadian, a loyal Ontarian and a dedicated citizen of his hometown of Newmarket and of York region. In fact, Ernie Crossland is known as "Mr. Community." Ernie Crossland has served our province and his local com-

munity with distinction, yet always with humility. His reputation as a person who gets things done for the benefit of the community has earned him the respect of political, business and community leaders, who continue to look to him for counsel, advice and inspiration.

Ernie Crossland's enthusiastic leadership and hands-on involvement with community groups and service clubs has enriched countless lives and has inspired environmental, cultural and humanitarian projects that will benefit Ontarians for generations to come. Mr. Crossland's volunteer contributions over more than 50 years are reflective of his belief that active participation in community life is not only a privilege, it is also a responsibility.

Today, I join with Community Living Newmarket/Aurora District, his family, his many friends, associates and community members in congratulating Ernie Crossland as the recipient of the Community Service Award for a Lifetime of Excellence in Service. No one is more deserving of this honour than my friend Ernie Crossland, and on behalf of all members of the Legislative Assembly, I extend our best wishes and sincere appreciation to this exemplary citizen of Ontario.

SCHOOL POOLS

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Gerard Kennedy, the former Minister of Education for this Liberal government, ran on a platform promising the province would be paying for Toronto school pools. That's what Mayor Miller told the Toronto Sun. We all know that Toronto school pools are the responsibility of the provincial government, and yet seven pools in Toronto are once again earmarked for closure: Bickford Centre, Bloor Collegiate, Central Commerce, Danforth Collegiate, Oakwood Collegiate, Parkdale Collegiate and the Ursula Franklin Academy.

Children in Toronto depend on these pools, as do most of the adult swimmers in the city. The McGuinty government made a promise to tackle childhood obesity by encouraging healthier diets and more physical activity. Your words, Premier, do not match your deeds. Closing school pools is short-sighted, and it's irresponsible at a time when childhood obesity has reached epidemic proportions.

School pools create community hubs. They bring people together; they bring parents and children together. They bring communities to the local school. They are a hub for physical activity.

Let's Make Waves is a coalition of parents, students and community school members demanding that you take action to keep these school pools open. I say to the people watching today, join me and join them: Let's make waves.

LONDON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORP.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to congratulate and honour the London Eco-

nomic Development Corp. LEDC has been encouraging entrepreneurship and providing support to industry growth in London. They offer a wealth of information and support, from providing grant opportunities to finding the right location to establish a business. LEDC has done great work for the city of London by simplifying the first steps of entrepreneurship.

At an economic roundtable I recently attended, LEDC proposed a creative idea to stimulate business growth in the city of London under the name "Export Market Access." It was recently implemented to assist businesses in London to expand their growth in a new foreign market beyond the United States. The idea is unique, and the benefits are enormous.

If a company qualifies, they are eligible for a grant that would cover 50% of the cost needed to develop export sales. Even though we are in difficult economic times, LEDC continues to build self-esteem in small and medium-sized businesses. Their role in London is essential, and I would like to show appreciation for their tireless efforts. Also, I want to congratulate the CEO of the LEDC of London, Mr. Peter White, for his continuous efforts to make sure that London and region attract a lot of business in order to be able to provide jobs for the good people of the city of London and the region.

From this place, I would like to continue my message to support and encourage the LEDC to continue doing a great job on behalf of all the people of the city of London and the London region. They're great people and they're doing the best to support our economy.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ted Arnott: When it comes to the state of Ontario's economy, the provincial government must focus on three big priorities: economic development, job training, and infrastructure investment to strengthen our long-term economic competitiveness. Here are just a few additional suggestions as to what this government should and must do in its upcoming budget.

They must outline a credible plan to eliminate their deficit and balance the provincial books.

They must thoroughly evaluate the idea of harmonizing the GST and PST and hold public hearings before making a final decision.

They must make the Ministry of Economic Development the lead ministry of government until the economy begins to grow again.

They must promote Ontario actively and aggressively, with the help of the best and the brightest of Ontario's public servants.

They must follow the advice they sought from Roger Martin and reduce taxes on new business investment in Ontario, now amongst the highest in the world.

They must develop a strategy to turn Toronto into the leading financial services city in the world.

They must make substantial new infrastructure investments. For example, we need a new hospital in Fergus and we need to have GO trains running through

Acton, Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo within three years' time.

They must consider a sales tax holiday for new vehicle purchases. Frank Miller did this when he was Treasurer, and it could be done again today in the auto industry's hour of need.

If they're willing to listen, we stand ready to provide solutions. With determined action, I know that Ontario's best days are yet to come.

EPILEPSY PEEL REGION

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: This past Friday I had the opportunity to attend Epilepsy Peel's first annual general meeting to mark the great work they have done and the growth they have achieved. The meeting was held at the Hershey Centre in my great riding of Mississauga-Brampton South. This organization helps residents with epilepsy to live happy and productive lives. Their volunteers have contributed greatly to improving the quality of life of those living with epilepsy in my community.

I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to those volunteers. Thank you for your hard work, thank you for your time, thank you for your passion and thank you for your dedication. In particular, I would like to thank Tahverlee Dunlop for her leadership and for reaching out to people in my community who would otherwise be isolated. I also want to congratulate Sandra O'Brien for winning the Shining Youth Award. Her volunteerism is a great example to youth in Peel.

I look forward to attending other Epilepsy Peel events and seeing even more progress in the years to come.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Julia Munro: Residents of my riding are tired of being treated as second-class citizens when it comes to their health care.

At the last council meeting, the mayor and councillors of my hometown of Georgina passed a resolution calling for the province to fix how health care is funded. The resolution calls on this government to speed up the implementation of the \$100-million hospital growth funding commitment, ensuring that growth funding is targeted to high-growth hospitals; to quickly implement population-needs-based funding for provincial hospital and health care services; and to develop a health care plan for Ontario's high-growth communities to complement the government's Places to Grow plan for development.

The Growing Communities Healthcare Alliance has calculated that residents of Georgina receive \$226 less per resident compared to other Ontarians for hospital care, translating into a \$282-million shortfall in annual operating funding.

This shortfall is not just a number. It means more of my constituents are on waiting lists, it means more of them are waiting in pain for surgery, and it almost certainly means that more of them are dying too soon, all

because the McGuinty Liberal government will not provide the funding my constituents need.

1510

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I would like to bring an important initiative to this House on behalf of a resident of my riding, Mr. Bill Attwell.

In emergency situations, time is always of the essence, and it is often critical that emergency workers rapidly contact a victim's next of kin. Today I would like to share a simple way that allows emergency personnel swift access to essential emergency contact information.

The cellphones of accident victims offer emergency workers a list of potential contact numbers. However, it is often difficult for them to identify which of the dozens of preprogrammed names and numbers in a given cellphone is appropriate to dial. A British paramedic developed a solution in 2005 whereby all cellphone users could use a common, easily identifiable code to flag their desired emergency contact person from their often extensive cellphone contacts.

The code is simple. In your cellphone contacts, create a new entry with the acronym ICE, or "in case of emergency," followed by the emergency contact's name and number. When emergency workers scroll through the cellphone of an individual with an ICE-labelled contact, they can thereby immediately identify the appropriate person's phone number.

In highlighting this program today, I encourage anyone who has not already done so to program an ICE name and number into their cellphone.

NURSE PRACTITIONERS

Mr. Bill Mauro: Three new nurse-practitioner-led clinics, including one in my riding of Thunder Bay-Atikokan, are strengthening Ontario family health care.

In Thunder Bay, a group of local NPs put together the proposal, including Lynne Thibeault, clinic coordinator and an NP at the NorWest Community Health Centre. Many NPs who are registered nurses have expressed interest, and a class of 12 NP students are graduating this summer at Lakehead University. NP-led clinics are a team-based approach to quality front-line health care while working with health care professionals such as family doctors.

As part of our primary care strategy, our government is also reversing years of inaction. There are 1,800 more doctors today than in 2003. That means 650,000 more Ontarians now have access to primary care. By 2012 we will have more than doubled the number of doctors graduating, from 500 to over 1,000. Overall, we are increasing the number of medical school spaces by 23%, over 150 more doctors start training yearly, and we are committed to adding 100 spaces. Our government has more than doubled the number of spots for international

medical graduates; 235 were trained last year, with 1,000 entering practice since 2003.

We passed Bill 97, which places a further duty on health regulatory colleges to ensure access.

We've also created 150 family health teams and we're committed to increasing that number. Thunder Bay—Atikokan has three: the Atikokan and district family health team, the Dilico family health team, and the Fort William family health team. These teams have created an integrated health care system that provides comprehensive—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

RENDEMENT SCOLAIRE

M. Phil McNeely: Je prends la parole aujourd'hui pour souligner les accomplissements de trois écoles de langue française de ma circonscription d'Ottawa—Orléans.

Depuis 2003, les résultats des tests provinciaux des élèves de 3^e et de 6^e année en lecture, écriture et mathématiques sont utilisés pour classer les 2 800 écoles élémentaires en Ontario. Ce classement est élaboré à partir de plusieurs facteurs comme les résultats des tests en lecture, écriture et mathématiques de l'Office de la qualité et de la responsabilité en éducation.

Parmi les cinq meilleures écoles d'Ottawa, trois sont des écoles de langue française de ma circonscription d'Ottawa—Orléans. L'école Des Sentiers se classe première dans la région d'Ottawa, avec une moyenne de 10; l'école l'Étoile-de-l'Est est en troisième place, avec une moyenne de 9,8; et l'école Le Prélude est en cinquième place avec une moyenne de 9,6. C'est l'école Des Sentiers de Fallingbrook qui arrive en première place avec une note parfaite de 10 sur 10.

Je suis très fier de prendre la parole afin de féliciter l'école élémentaire publique Des Sentiers et son directeur, Robert Loranger; l'école élémentaire catholique l'Étoile-de-l'Est et sa directrice, Marie-Josée Leclerc; et l'école élémentaire publique Le Prélude et son directeur, Pierre Campeau, qui obtiennent certains des meilleurs résultats de la vallée d'Ottawa.

Les investissements et la stratégie dans l'éducation de notre gouvernement produisent des fruits et les élèves des quatre coins de la province améliorent leurs résultats aux—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Merci.
The member for Durham.

IRISH HERITAGE DAY

Mr. John O'Toole: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: This coming Tuesday is March 17, Irish Heritage Day in Ontario, Canada and around the world. I'd just like to remind members that Sunday, March 15—Jack Ferns is the parade chair—I'd like people to celebrate the St. Patrick's Day Parade with Grand Marshals Robert and Jonathan Kearns. I'd ask members to celebrate Irish Heritage, as we do all heritage in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable member from Durham. That was not a point of order, but I do agree with him that it is important that we celebrate Irish Heritage Day and St. Patrick's Day. I have a good friend, Don Cosens, who will be becoming the president of the Irish Benevolent Society in London and is very excited about that.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

COMITÉ DE LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

Je demande la permission de déposer un rapport du Comité permanent de la politique sociale et je propose son adoption.

I send it to you by way of page Rachel G.

The Acting Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Anne Stokes): Mr. Qaadri from the Standing Committee on Social Policy presents the committee's report as follows and moves its adoption.

Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 141, An Act to amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 141, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

PETITIONS

SALES TAX

Mr. Frank Klees: I have some 1,100 signatures on a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly. It relates to the implementation of a sales tax holiday for vehicle sales. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the auto industry in Ontario and throughout North America is experiencing a major restructuring; and

"Whereas the current economic crisis is affecting the auto manufacturers and the front-line dealerships throughout Ontario; and

"Whereas many potential automobile purchasers are having difficulty accessing credit even at current prices; and

"Whereas a three-month tax holiday of the GST and the PST on the purchase of new and used cars and trucks would stimulate auto sales;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the provincial and federal governments to implement a three-month tax holiday, and that the Ontario Minister of Finance include the PST holiday in the next provincial budget."

I affix my signature to this because I do believe it's an appropriate initiative for the government.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to introduce the following petition. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents, as requested in Bill 33 ... ; and

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

I'm proud to sign my signature in support.

1520

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole: This morning I asked a question of the Minister of Health, and I wasn't very satisfied with the answer. Now I have thousands of petitions coming in and they read as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the municipality of Clarington passed resolution C-049-09 in support of Lakeridge Health Bowmanville; and

"Whereas area doctors, hospital staff and citizens have raised concerns that Bowmanville's hospital could turn into little more than a site to stabilize and transfer patients for treatment outside the municipality; and

"Whereas Clarington is a growing community of over 80,000 people; and

"Whereas we support the continuation of the Lakeridge Bowmanville site through access to on-site services, including emergency room, internal medicine and general surgery;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the McGuinty government take" all "necessary actions to fund our hospitals" equitably "and fairly"—nothing more. "And furthermore, we request that the clinical services plan of the Central East Local Health Integration Network address the need for the Bowmanville hospital to continue to offer a complete range of services appropriate for the growing community of Clarington."

I am pleased to sign and support this, and present it to page Xiao.

LUPUS

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to stand again and have the opportunity to introduce this petition. I want to thank the Lupus Foundation of Ontario, located in Ridgeway in my riding, for allowing me to do so. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

I'm proud to sign my signature in support of this petition.

PROTECTION OF MINORS

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, signed by good citizens of Cambridge.

"Whereas there is no law in Ontario prohibiting pornography and other sexually explicit material from being viewed on computers in public schools and libraries; and

"Whereas there are public schools and public libraries that do not use Internet filtering software on computers that blocks such inappropriate material; and

"Whereas parents in the province of Ontario have the right to ensure their children are protected from pornography and other inappropriate material available on the Internet in their public schools and libraries;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: That all public schools and libraries in Ontario be required to install Internet filtering software on computers to avoid screening of sites with inappropriate, explicit sexual content."

As I agree and support this petition, I affix my name thereto.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole: It's appropriate that I offer this petition twice, because it's that important. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the municipality of Clarington passed resolution C-049-09 in support of Lakeridge Health Bowmanville; and

"Whereas area doctors, hospital staff and citizens have raised concerns that Bowmanville's hospital could turn into little more than a site to stabilize and transfer patients for treatment outside the municipality; and

"Whereas Clarington is a growing community of over 80,000" people; and

"Whereas we support the continuation of the Lake-ridge Bowmanville site through access to on-site services, including emergency room, internal medicine and general surgery;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, request and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the McGuinty government take the necessary actions to fund our hospital equally and fairly. And furthermore, we request that the clinical services plan of the Central East Local Health Integration Network address the need for the Bowmanville hospital to continue to offer a complete range of services appropriate for the growing community of Clarington."

I am pleased to present this to Alexander on his second-last day here in the Legislature of Ontario.

SALES TAX

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the auto industry in Ontario and throughout North America is experiencing a major restructuring; and

"Whereas the current economic crisis is affecting the auto manufacturers and the front-line dealerships throughout Ontario; and

"Whereas many potential automobile purchasers are having difficulty accessing credit even at current prices; and

"Whereas a three-month tax holiday of the GST and the PST on the purchase of new and used cars and trucks would stimulate auto sales;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the provincial and federal governments to implement a three-month tax holiday and that the Ontario Minister of Finance include the PST holiday in the next provincial budget."

CHILD CARE

Mr. John O'Toole: A change of pace is always good. My petition reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Honourable Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for the temporary care assistance allowance; and

"Whereas the removal of this temporary care assistance could mean that the children would be forced into foster care; and

"Whereas the temporary care assistance amounts to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would receive to look after the same child if they were forced into foster care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse the decision of the Minister of Social Services to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren."

I am pleased to sign and support and endorse this on behalf of the many grandparents threatened by this unfair treatment and present it to Ashton, one of the pages on the second-last day of a terrific world experience here at Queen's Park.

INTERPROVINCIAL BRIDGE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas:

"(1) ROCHE-NCE, a consulting firm hired to study potential sites for an interprovincial crossing between Ottawa and Gatineau, is recommending that an interprovincial bridge across the Ottawa River be built at Kettle Island, connecting to the scenic Aviation Parkway in Ottawa, turning it into a four-lane commuter and truck route passing through downtown residential communities; and

"(2) Along the proposed route are homes, seniors' apartments, schools, parks, the Montfort Long Term Care Facility and the Montfort Hospital, all of which would be severely impacted by noise, vibration and disease-causing air pollution; and

"(3) A truck and commuter route through neighbourhoods is a safety issue because of the increased risk to pedestrians and cyclists and the transport of hazardous materials; and

"(4) There are other, more suitable corridors further east, outside of the downtown core, which would have minimal impact on Ottawa residents;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To reject the recommendation of a bridge at Kettle Island and to select a more suitable corridor to proceed to phase two of the interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study."

I agree with this petition and sign it and send it to you through page Reed.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Robert Bailey: I have a petition here addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario—2,400 names here exactly:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care should recognize the importance of rural health care in Ontario; and

"Whereas the Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network commissioned a report by the Hay Group that recommends downgrading the emergency room at the Charlotte Eleanor Englehart ... Hospital in Petrolia to an urgent-care ward; and

"Whereas, if accepted, this recommendation would increase the demand on emergency room services in Sarnia; and

"Whereas, as of today, many patients are already redirected from Sarnia to the Petrolia emergency room... ; and

"Whereas the Petrolia medical community has stated that the loss of the Petrolia emergency room will result in the loss of many of our local doctors; and

"Whereas Petrolia's retirement and nursing home communities are dependent on early access to the CEE hospital;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to urge the Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network to completely reject the report of the Hay Group and leave the emergency room designation at Charlotte Eleanor Englehart Hospital in Petrolia."

I agree with this petition, affix my name to it and send it down with Arjun.

1530

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas elementary school-aged children in the province of Ontario suffering from diabetes require regular blood sugar monitoring and may also require insulin and glucagon to manage their disease; and

"Whereas there is no medical or nursing assistance readily available in schools as there was in the past; and

"Whereas the parents/guardians of these children must currently visit their child's school several times throughout the day in order to test their child's blood sugar levels; and

"Whereas the absence of medical support in our elementary schools results in substantial stress and disruption to the lives of children and their working parents;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That elementary schools in the province of Ontario have on-site staff trained in the daily monitoring of blood sugar levels of children who suffer from diabetes; and

"(2) That the trained staff also administer insulin and glucagon when required, with the consent of the child's parent/guardian."

As I support this petition, I affix my name thereto and provide it to Grace.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREEN ENERGY AND GREEN ECONOMY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR L'ÉNERGIE VERTE ET L'ÉCONOMIE VERTE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 9, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 150, An Act to enact the Green Energy Act, 2009 and to build a green economy, to repeal the Energy Conservation Leadership Act, 2006 and the Energy Efficiency Act and to amend other statutes / Projet de loi 150, Loi édictant la Loi de 2009 sur l'énergie verte et visant à développer une économie verte, abrogeant la Loi de 2006 sur le leadership en matière de conservation de l'énergie et la Loi sur le rendement énergétique et modifiant d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: It's my pleasure to be able to make a few comments today on the Green Energy Act. I think it's important for people to understand some of the background here. First of all, it is a bill that was introduced into the Legislature at the end of February. This continues, then, the second reading debate on this bill, which, by the way, is about 65 pages long. It contemplates changes in 15 other pieces of existing legislation, so it needs to be understood that it is a very complex bill. Certainly the potential effects of this bill, should it be passed, will be a very long time in terms of having an impact on the province.

I think it's important to realize that today, when we're talking about energy, it's more than lights and air conditioning; it is the major stimulus necessary for jobs in this province. Ontario has had a proud history of reliable and relatively inexpensive electric power. It was an important feature in attracting major industrial and commercial activities to our province.

Sadly, today, the energy landscape has changed dramatically. For years, the energy supply has been a mixed supply, including nuclear, coal and hydro as the main sources, with a growing amount from renewables. In 2001, we announced through our then Minister of the Environment, Elizabeth Witmer, the closing of the Lakeview coal generation plant. We agreed that old-style coal-

fired furnaces should be replaced. When the Liberals campaigned in 2003, they promised to close all coal-fired generation by 2007. Nothing closed. Then they promised by 2009. Nothing closed. Next was 2014. Nothing has happened since the closing of Lakeview. The need for replacing coal-fired furnaces and aging nuclear plants, as well as the opportunities for greater renewable generation, has created pressing needs for Ontario's demand for power.

There is a website, www.opg.com/power, which lets you know the demand, the generation mix and the cost on an hourly basis, 24/7. It certainly provides a public awareness of the importance of this mix and how much demand actually changes the cost on an hourly basis.

In looking at this bill, I think that in the time I have, there are a few areas I would like to comment on. Obviously, 10 minutes is not long enough to talk about the full implications of this bill.

To begin with, one concern is the question of generation. There are many people who are predicting that there will be shortfalls. There will be shortfalls for a number of reasons, but one of them is the question of replacement. As I mentioned, the coal-fired furnaces don't even have a date of closing at this point. There is no plan for that. But what we do know is that 80% of the generation must be replaced by the 2020s. That, in that process of going out to the 2020s, will mean that we are going to have supply shortfalls by 2013 and 2014.

We're also going to be looking at the extremely expensive costs of making some of these changes. Wind and solar, for instance, are expensive, in part because neither is full-time and also because each requires extensive distribution and transmission upgrades in order to connect to the grid. This is something that, again, the bill alludes to. But I think it's important for people to understand that the cost of having these come on is extremely expensive, and certainly looking at other jurisdictions demonstrates how expensive it is, but also because of the fact that it is as time passes that these are going to come online.

The other area is that this bill gives enormous power to the minister and the ministry. One of those is in section 15 of the bill, where there are contemplated powerful agents or inspectors: the energy police who, with a warrant, may enter a place without notice. A fine up to \$25,000 is permissible for interfering with the inspector, or even failing to assist is an offence.

Section 2 of the bill requires every person trying to sell a home to hire an inspector or auditor to conduct an energy efficiency audit of the property and provide that to prospective purchasers and the government. It will also eliminate the role of municipalities in planning and in approvals for renewable energy projects by providing province-wide standards. This certainly has raised an issue in my riding with regard to the area that Transport Canada has as four kilometres from an airport. The municipalities historically have respected this. Naturally, it throws into some speculation whether or not that kind of standard would be included in this new legislation.

The cost will increase as more expensive generation is added to the mix, and certainly creating a grid system smart enough to work with new technologies and energy sources will be very costly. The government has said that 50,000 jobs will be created, but there's no analysis to support that suggestion. I don't have time to provide any kind of extensive look at commentary, but I would just say that in recent newspaper references to this, Lawrence Solomon in the March 7 National Post referred to this as "Ontario's Gangreen Act," and Terence Corcoran referred to it as the "Big Green Lie." He referred to the fact that this would be the "green power tax-and-grab." I think that when we look at the complexity of this bill, the assumptions it's built on, we have to look at what other people are saying and what the experience elsewhere has been.

1540

When you look in other jurisdictions, particularly in Europe, it seems to be economically devastating. I'm just going to take a moment to quote from Peter Foster in the March 11 National Post. He refers to a presentation that was made by "a Spanish economist who indicated how Spain's 'leadership' in subsidizing wind and solar power—which" by the way "had been praised by President Obama—had produced enormous costs, no benefits and was now falling apart. 'Green jobs' were calculated not only to cost ... half a million euros a pop, they came at the expense of two 'normal' jobs. And they were now disappearing as the renewables bubble collapsed."

In the face of this kind of evidence that we can find around the world, evidence of the fact that this bill takes us out many years, the fact that there is no plan at this point to deal with the shortfalls in energy, this government has to look very, very carefully, through the public hearings process, at ways we can look at this bill as something we should go forward with.

It's very seductive to talk about renewable energies, but we do have to look at the other side of the ledger, look at the kinds of experiences other jurisdictions have had and find out why people are calling it the Ontario Gangreen act.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to have a chance to respond to the comments by the member opposite from York-Simcoe.

As someone who lobbied aggressively to protect the health and well-being of my community, and who sought the closure of Lakeview generating facility, I can tell you that it is imperative that we acknowledge the importance of having established alternative sources of electricity generation. Despite the fact that a promise was made by the previous government to close the Lakeview generating facility, no plan was put in place as to how that electricity would be replaced.

In fact, the reliance on the utilization of coal to generate electricity by the previous government was really historic. From 1995 to 2003, coal use went up by 127%. We all know that coal is cheap and it's dirty, because it

externalizes the cost of the generation of that electricity to all of us—to the air we breathe, to our land, to our farmers—and that is why we, as a government, sought to work with those experts and really establish the true cost of generating electricity by the use of coal.

That's why we reduced our reliance on coal by 36% from 2003 to 2008, and why we, since October 2003, have put more than 5,000 megawatts of new supply—15% of the current capacity. Nearly 4,000 megawatts of additional new and refurbished supply is expected to come into service by June 2010. By 2011, we'll have brought almost 10,000 megawatts of new capacity online since 2003. Those are serious commitments to move us away from dirty, cheap coal electricity, and they're important steps forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I'm pleased to comment on the remarks of my colleague the member for York-Simcoe, who has approached Bill 150 on a very practical level. She has pointed out her concerns.

There seems to be a concept, in terms of the environment, that somehow we can obtain something for nothing. Quite frankly, we cannot. Anyone who says there is something for nothing in this world is unfortunately mistaken. The problem is simply that we must do something about our environment. We know that our children will suffer down the road as a result of the actions we have taken and the actions we are taking now.

It is important that in this time of economic turmoil, with people losing their jobs not only in this country but across this world, we ensure that we can approach the environment on a level which will cause as little disruption as possible, at least in the short term, so that we can continue on providing the very important services to those most vulnerable in our society. I think my colleague has pointed out the moderate approach that we should be taking, and I commend her for her remarks.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: The government talks about renewable energy. I'll give you an example of renewable energy that they're not taking advantage of. You notice that the steel mills in Hamilton are in big trouble and are closing down. If you drive across the Skyway Bridge you can see a landscape of large stacks with a lot of fire coming out of them, a lot of gas. That's called cogeneration.

A few years ago, the Liberal government in Ottawa promised millions and millions of dollars to go ahead with a cogen project at the then Stelco. After the election—and the member from Hamilton lost that election—that \$30 million disappeared. Lots of megawatts could come out of Hamilton, out of those steel mills. Those are already there; they're already producing steel. They could harness that energy and it could be able to put into the grid, but there's no talk of that. They talk about renewable energy, but I didn't hear any talk of those things.

There are so many obvious ways to generate energy out there that are not being utilized, and I'd be more than

happy to give them more examples in Hamilton where you could harness that energy and put it to good use. I didn't see any of that in their big, green energy act—none of that. There are all kinds of materials and all kinds of energy-efficient plants in Hamilton that could be utilized to harness this. I don't even want to begin to think how many megawatts that one plant alone—the one battery of coke ovens in Stelco could have kept 5,000 homes with electricity—5,000—just in Hamilton. They didn't harness it; they didn't talk about it. They went another way.

It's not like those ideas weren't out there. This is not a new thing; it's just that it hasn't been utilized. The Liberal government in Ottawa at the time missed a great opportunity five years ago to do anything, and they still haven't done it. I've got people out on the street without jobs who could have been working there.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I did listen carefully to my colleague from York-Simcoe. This bill, I think, is perceived differently in some jurisdictions than it may be in others. In my particular case, I've had a number of small business people—I think of my good friend Simon, who lives on Maria Street in Peterborough; he's a neighbour of mine. He has a new business called Solar Generation Plus. Over the last number of years he has added two, three and four trucks and he has hired new people because he's in the solar electricity generation business. He called my office immediately after the bill was introduced to get a copy of Bill 150.

I have another small company in Norwood, which is in the rural part of Peterborough riding. The owner of that particular business also gave me a call to get a copy of Bill 150 because he'd been involved in some solar generation projects, particularly in northern Ontario.

From my perspective, Bill 150 provides an exciting framework for the future. We've got to realize that on any given day, the economy of Ontario needs some 14,700 megawatts of baseload capacity, so we have to have generation in place to make sure we have that baseload capacity. We can't put Ontario on stilts to generate more run-of-the-river electricity.

We are currently drilling the third tunnel at Beck in Niagara Falls to take advantage of the run of the river in that particular area. We're looking at opportunities for biogas and biomass. I can tell you of municipalities in Ontario that are looking at ways to capture methane gas, which is a product of decomposing garbage, and use that to put small generation facilities on these old landfill sites and to put into the grid. I happen to see this bill as a lot of exciting opportunities for the population of Ontario.

1550

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for York Simcoe, you have two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I appreciate the comments made by the members for Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Cambridge, Hamilton East-Stoney Creek and Peterborough.

Going to the comments that the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore made, a history lesson in what happened is really not as important to us today as this bill and where we are going in the future. There are a number of things that I think we have to be concerned about.

One is that although different members, as did the member from Peterborough, talked about other methods of generation that are coming on stream, and certainly I see that as appropriate, my concern is that it's not enough. There hasn't been, obviously, as I pointed out, a steady increase to match the decommissioning of coal-fired furnaces, which is why we've only seen one actually happen.

The other thing is that, when we talk about cogeneration, there seems to be very little in this bill with regard to that. That has been something that industry has always maintained a certain amount of interest in and wanted to find out what kind of detail this would provide for us.

But the fact that the government is not yet at a point where any plans can go forward on its refurbishing of nuclear means that with each of these things—the decommissioning, the commitments to nuclear—we're all looking at a shortfall in the not-too-distant future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: This Green Energy Act is just another act, and, trust me, the Liberals have all kinds of acts. They have more acts than a three-ring circus, and for most of their acts, that's where they belong.

But we have to remember that there is a cost for all these acts. There is a cost and a consequence to our economy, our justice system and our democracy, and it is so clear that this one attacks our democracy and our economy so vigorously. The Liberal government, with this act, is sacrificing our democracy for administrative bureaucracy.

I'd like to take a few moments to read a couple of paragraphs from an article titled "Removing Local Democracy Never the Solution." It was written by Grant Robertson, the head of the National Farmers Union of Ontario, and it goes like this:

"It seems these days all manner of sins can be hidden by just throwing the label 'green' on it.

"For those like the National Farmers Union that have fought for sound and sustainable environmental policies long before it was trendy, seeing the word 'green' co-opted is indeed troubling.

"It is clear that this is precisely what the McGuinty government is up to with this so-called 'Green' Energy Act."

It goes on to say, "Much of this 'green' energy production is taking up good farmland. It rarely occurs in places such as along the lakeshore in downtown Toronto or in Rosedale. To address local concerns, the McGuinty government is simply going to legislate that municipalities have no power to create local rules for local communities.... For those who cheer these rules they need to take a step back and consider the very dangerous precedent this will set....

"This is the thin edge of the wedge and those who support this as a short-term solution will rue the day when something they don't like comes to their neck of the woods."

I think we have to take a step back. We asked the Liberal government to go to committee after first reading. This is indeed sacrificing our democracy for the expediencies of administrative bureaucracy.

I want to further say that when the minister brought this bill forward, when he was told that there are no objectives in this legislation—and that is clear, there are no objectives identified—the minister said, "Targets are limits." Of course you can't be held to account if you don't have any objectives, but there are no limits in this bill. There are no limits on the cost of the feed-in tariffs. There's no limit on the size of the bureaucracy it's going to create. There's no limit on the new inspectors we're going to create, and there's no limit on the red tape that this bill creates. That is a Liberal idea of a green act—no limits on cost or expenses and no targets or objectives that they can be held to account on.

I want to also quote a few things that some of my constituents have sent to me about the Green Energy Act. This is from Kathleen Patchell from Carleton Place: "By doing so, the minister has systematically denied us, the citizens of Ontario, the proper forum to address ... objections." "Under the Green Energy Act, standard access to information requests will be considered 'protected' and kept secret. This is a blatant denial of taxpayer rights to know the costs and benefits of the McGuinty Liberal government ... programs."

"Bill 150 is an undemocratic, irresponsible piece of legislation proposed by the dictatorial McGuinty Liberal government." It "is a glaring example of the McGuinty Liberal government's systematic indifference to the rights and interests of rural Ontarians...."

I can go on and on. That's how the people of Ontario view this Green Energy Act. It is not what we expect. This is an act of camouflage, as Grant Robertson from the NFU said in his e-mail, co-opting that green label.

I also found it interesting that, a few weeks ago, the Premier was going on quite at length in the media about the cost of red tape and regulations. Here's a couple of them. On January 30, the Premier said, "Why do we put so many roadblocks in the way of businesses when it comes to growth?" "We're putting ourselves through too many hoops...." "We've got to make sure we're not acting as a brake on economic growth." That's what he said to the Ottawa Citizen. In the Sun he said, "We've got a thickening of red tape in Ontario and I would argue across the country. We need to address that."

Just a few weeks ago, the Premier of this province was recognizing the cost of red tape. A few weeks later, Bill 150 comes into the House and what does it propose? More bureaucracy, more inspectors, more red tape. Has this government become schizophrenic? It doesn't know what it's saying or doing from one day to the next. Can we not have a clear and concise and understandable message? What is it? Are we going to create more red

tape or are we going to get the economy running? Are we going to get out of the way or are we going to put up more barriers? Let's give the people of Ontario a clear, simple, understandable and logical message from this House. We're not getting it from this government. This province has 500,000 pieces of regulation and rules, according to the Premier a couple weeks ago, and we're going to get some more.

We hear the good talk about saving farmland and then we get a policy that says, "No more local decisions; no more local control. Farmland is not important. Green energy is the important thing today." The people of Ontario are going to be paying dearly for this piece of legislation for a long, long time, long after we are gone.

1600

We cannot retire the debt from Ontario Hydro if we do not put a limit on the cost of this project. Right now, it's capped on solar at 42 cents a kilowatt hour. Ontario Hydro has to pay that, and they have to sell it at 5.6 cents a kilowatt hour. Anybody can understand, they're going in the hole, and now we're going to take off that cap of 42 cents—no limit on the expense that this government will go for.

It appears to me, and I think to everyone, that what is common about all these green and clean acts that this Liberal government brings out is that there is a big shade of red involved with all of them: red tape, deficits and cost. They have to get their act together. Get out of the three-ring circus. Let's do what's right. Let's not just appease and move to whatever interest group is moving you on this particular day. Let's move in the right direction. Let's do the right thing. Let's get our economy running, not add to the unemployment and be competitive. Let's become productive. Let's get out of the way and let people create a more competitive and productive environment. I've said it before: What's so clear to me and what I see so often from this Liberal government is that it is built on a foundation of false philosophies and vain wisdom.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to make some comments here at this time. The member mentioned that this initiative of wind towers was taking up valuable land. We have a wind turbine farm in Port Alma. There are 44 towers there. Both the Premier and Minister Smitherman have made visits to Port Alma to see this. The footprint for these towers is very small indeed.

I can say, however, that they are very deep into the ground. There are many truckloads of cement at the base going downward to hold the tower up in the air. I know that the local economy was thrilled with the expansion of these 44 wind towers. They got to provide the cement, rebar and other materials for the building, and there were lots of jobs created. Some 70 jobs were created in that initiative.

Further to that, we're having another 162 towers proposed to go up. The municipality will be receiving property taxes from this. Landowners, who might be

farmers or might be other citizens, will be receiving their share of the power going onto the grid. Others will be receiving leases and lease monies for the lands, should there be other towers put in into the future. So it's a win all the way around. We have lease monies and property tax monies, and the footprint, as I say, is not that large.

I was told the other day at a summit promoting green energy that we have over 3,000 transmission towers in Chatham-Kent. So we've gone a long way to providing power for the people, for our businesses, for industry with 3,000 transmission towers, as opposed to only 44 green towers. We have to build this infrastructure.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I was responding to the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, and after you've said the name of the riding, you know that he speaks for the people in rural Ontario. I can assure you that I'm hearing the same. There will be a few farmers, at the end of the day, and agricultural rural residents who will be satisfied with this because of the revenue that they will gain from having a wind turbine or other project mounted on their property, but there will be others who won't be satisfied, probably the majority.

I can recall a project that was brought up in my riding in Uxbridge. The project was quite controversial because the province would not set standards on setbacks or other interventions. Now, what happened is there was quite a large, respectable leader in agriculture who was in the livestock business who took the trouble to have a scientist perform a kind of modelling of the effect of what was called flickering—not Flick Off, which was the Minister of Energy and conservation; it was flickering. This is the effect of sunlight going through the blades as they turn through the wind. This flickering effect disturbs cattle and livestock. It is a proven scientific fact. When I read the release by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, I was so upset that they had once again been compromised by government policy.

To stand independently and say this thing should be further and more clearly debated, to try and push this through under the guise of being green and the Green Energy Act—when you drill down in the content, it's anything but. What it means is you're going to use less energy, and you're going to pay more for it.

Those victims, small communities and others, are going to have these blemishes on the landscape with no opportunity for input, not even by municipal officials. This is an overriding, arrogant piece of intrusion into Ontario policy that needs full debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I think we should remind ourselves, just responding to the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, that that government got out of the way back in the 1990s, and we got Walkerton. We have to think about that.

In the context of the towers, I'm reminded of sort of what the towers look like, because I've been in a few

fields where they have been. I was out in Saskatchewan and Alberta about three years ago, and I saw those oil wells taking up a small part of the farmland but pumping dollars out for the owner, pumping dollars out for the community and pumping dollars out for the oil company. I think that when we look at the imprint of these towers, that's just one of the things the province will be looking at, a standard approach. This government and this bill will be promoting a standard approach across the province on the siting of these turbines. I think that is a good approach. I don't think we can have helter-skelter regulations; I think this makes sense, and it will be going out for a lot of discussion and input from the many people involved.

Last night I was talking to Rob McMonagle, senior energy consultant, energy efficiency office, city of Toronto, and there are so many projects in the city of Toronto that require that stronger grid, that \$5-billion investment and those 50,000 jobs over three years. It's a big job creator, it's a good project, and it's going to mean a lot for the whole province of Ontario. The First Nations have reasons to want a stronger grid.

That investment wasn't made in the 1990s; it has to be made now. We have to prepare for the future, prepare for the electric car. If you're reading about some of the issues, the electric car is coming, so we have to prepare the grid for that. That's the way we should go, so I think we have to have a more positive aspect of where we're going in this province and go ahead with this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I appreciate the time here to be able to make a couple of comments on the speech given to us by my colleague the member for Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington.

The most important thing, I think, that he spoke about was the issue of democracy, because of the fact that when you look at parts of this bill, it certainly empowers the minister and the ministry in ways that are a significant departure from what has always traditionally been the purview of the municipality. Now, I know the argument is that people can hold up processes and progress through local action, and it can be time-consuming and it can be divisive and so on and so forth. I guess one of my responses to that is simply that democracy isn't meant to be an easy process. It's certainly something that people have always recognized has a certain cumbersome quality to it, but it means that there is that opportunity to have a say.

1610

But beyond that, I think that the intrusion of government in terms of the energy police—these are even greater issues for people to deal with, to understand that this is part of the package of this bill, and the fact that people will be fined for not assisting.

So I think the main thrust of his argument is the fact that we need to look at this bill from the perspective of what it does for the community, the threat to the individual and ways by which those issues should be addressed.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I want to thank the members from York-Simcoe, Durham, Ottawa-Orléans and Chatham-Kent.

Now I understand why the Liberal government is so into windmills. It's because of the constant spin that I hear from the other side—spin and spin and spin. On this side of the House, we like to speak truthfully. I'm going to burst the little green bubble that's been floating over on the other side from the member from Chatham-Kent. I spoke about solar panels, not windmills. Your footprint is in the wrong ditch. Solar panels—I've been receiving many calls from the farming community down in GPR over the class 1 farmland that is being taken out of production for solar panels down in the Hawkesbury area.

There is tremendous opposition to this Green Energy Act. We have a duty, and you have a duty, to listen to people: See what those consequences are, and just don't live in that little green bubble where the windmill keeps spinning and spinning and spinning. Let's be truthful, let's be honest and let's do what's right for the people of this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

I was giving some others the opportunity, but we'll go to the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 150, the so-called green energy bill. We're down to 10-minute rotations, so I don't have a lot of time to get into all the details, but I would like to hit on some aspects of the bill.

The Progressive Conservative members are definitely in favour of green energy, and we're doing what we can to support green energy development in this province. But we're concerned about the economy and people's jobs as well, and I think that those are important considerations.

In the time I have available, I'd like to start by talking about the mandatory energy audits that are required by this bill. Just based on personal experience, I'll point out why I think it's a bad idea to have mandatory energy audits.

I personally had an energy audit done last year. The way it ended up coming about was I decided to replace an air conditioner that had been broken a couple of years with an air-to-air heat pump for our home, which would be a lot more efficient, able to heat in the spring and fall as well as air condition.

Having decided to do that, I went to the company that was going to put the air-to-air heat pump in, and they said, "Well, if you get an energy audit done, then you'll get \$600 or \$800," I think it was, "back from the government programs, the federal/provincial government programs."

Based on that, I then had an energy audit done. I think it cost about \$400 to get the energy audit done. After it

was done, one of the things they said I should do is put in an air-to-air heat pump, which seems to be kind of a silly way of going about it: You have to spend \$400 to get \$800 back to do something you planned on doing anyway. I would suggest for all governments that it might be better, if you decide that an air-to-air heat pump or a ground-source heat pump is an efficient way to heat a house—why not just give the rebate, keep it simple and not make the consumer go through hoops? Just give them the rebate on the purchase of that air-to-air heat pump or ground-source heat pump.

That's how I ended up getting an energy audit; it was voluntary. There was other information that came from the audit that was interesting and useful; I agree with that. They pointed out that we should replace a door we knew was leaky—it had a lot of air coming through it. They suggested that the air handler on the house, which we knew was quite old, could be replaced as well—things we did know about.

In the audit, they also said we could replace all the windows in the house as well. I think there are 28 windows. They're big, reasonable quality wood frame windows that it would not make any sense to replace in terms of the cost saving in energy going forward. However, if we were in the situation of going to sell our house and were required by this bill to have a mandatory energy audit, this could actually be used as a bargaining tool against the seller, who would be me in that case, where the purchaser, having had the mandatory energy audit done, could say, "Well, the energy audit says you should replace your windows," even though they're fairly reasonable quality. All of us in this place know the cost of replacing of 28 windows. I suspect it would be \$25,000 or \$30,000 for those big windows. So the purchaser could say, at that point, "You're going to have to take \$25,000 off the price." That's something that could end up happening inadvertently from these mandatory energy audits.

I would say that at committee the government should consider making them not mandatory, particularly on new homes—maybe homes within 10 years of being built—because I would think most new homes are going to be built to current standards and to the new standards that are going to be required in this bill. The mandatory energy audit in this bill is something I certainly think should be changed at committee.

Another very important aspect of this bill is what it's going to do for energy costs—probably one of the most important considerations, because there are a lot of unknowns out there. The minister said it's going to create a 1% increase in costs, and I would really question that. Is that believable? We know that the government has made commitments in the past. In the energy line, they made a commitment in the 2003 election that they were going to shut down the coal-fired generating stations by 2007. That was a silly promise. It was virtually impossible to accomplish. The current promise is to shut down coal-fired generation by 2014. I say this 1% increase falls in line with some of those past promises: It's just not believable.

I certainly am concerned about what the costs of fully implementing this bill will be to the consumer and to industry in this province, because we're making it easier, through the feed-in tariff rates for photovoltaic solar to hook up to the grid, for example. I think the current photovoltaic rate is about 42 cents a kilowatt hour. Consumers pay 5, 5.5 or 6 cents a kilowatt hour for electricity. That means that as these projects come on, obviously they're going to bump up the average price of electricity. I think wind power—and this bill brings in a right to connect—is in the 12 to 15 cents a kilowatt power range, obviously far above the current price we're paying. Through the right-to-connect provisions in this bill, all the consumers out there are going to end up paying for improvements to the wires that would need to happen to hook up some of these projects. All consumers will pay to hook up any particular project that is hooked on.

It is going to have a price effect on the cost of electricity. That is a real concern. We know that in places in Europe, they pay double the cost that we do for electricity, usually around 20 cents per kilowatt hour. That is very concerning for the individual consumer, but as well for industry in this province. What is it going to do to the competitiveness of industry in this province?

I think there are some positives—I don't want to be completely negative—and unfortunately I'm almost out of my 10 minutes. I have a list of about six other things I wanted to cover. There are some opportunities here. I know that we have businesses like forestry companies in Parry Sound–Muskoka that have put in RFPs, prior to this bill being passed, to do combined heat-power projects where they use slash from forestry to run boilers to make steam to generate seven or eight kilowatts of electricity and also make wood pellets that are possible feed as a replacement for coal. Those are positive possibilities. I obviously would like to see those jobs in Parry Sound–Muskoka, and it probably makes sense if the end product is going to be wood pellets that may be burned in coal-fired generating stations in southern Ontario. I would assume with those wood pellets, transportation is going to be a big part of it.

1620

Just recently I met with a company called Copperhill Solar, which is based in Norwood, Ontario. John Verway is the president. That's a thermal solar company that has been in business six years. They came to see me, I think, because he'd set up one of his systems at the Quiet Bay Log Motel in Magnetawan. I think solar thermal probably makes some sense as compared to photovoltaic, which I'm not sure makes sense in the province of Ontario, just based on our climate. But so far, the system—I was speaking to Walter and Regula Reich at the Quiet Bay Log Motel, and it seems to be working quite well there. I think there's a lot of potential for companies like Copperhill.

But really, in conclusion, because I'm already down to only one minute left, yes, we're in favour of green energy. We have to be very careful about what happens

to the cost of electricity in the province of Ontario as this bill is implemented. Number one, we have to have reliable energy in this province. We have to have sustainable energy and, just as or more important, we have to have competitively priced electricity in this province. Also, we have to deal with reality. The fact is that pretty much half of the electricity, the baseload electricity, which is so important, is generated by nuclear generating stations, and of course we still have hydroelectric generating stations and coal-fired generating stations that produce a lot of that baseload power. So cost certainly is a big consideration. I can't hit the other five points I have, because I'm pretty much out of time. I'll hit them in my response to those who wish to comment.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm very pleased to stand in my place here today to respond to the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka. I think a lot of his presentation was based on the energy audits, which are done by certified energy advisers across this province and across this land. These people are certified by the Ministry of Energy, federal government. It's something that has been going on for many years. We've only got up to 38,000, I think now, but there's 2.7 million just in the section that's covered by these energy advisers, which is up to three storeys, section 9 of the building code.

I'd like to just read some comments by one of the members of your caucus, member for Parry Sound-Muskoka.

"I support the whole idea of conservation culture, the whole idea that the best plan for energy and energy efficiency is conservation. The kilowatt that you don't consume is the kilowatt you don't have to generate. So"—referring to me—he said, "he's on the right track." He also said, "We've decided as a caucus to support Mr. McNeely's bill ... this was one of the planks in our platform in the election in 2007. Okay? It was in our platform. Therefore, it must be a good decision. It's efficient use of our resources, in the general sense."

Mr. Love, the conservation commissioner of Ontario, had it in his 2007 report.

"Then they brought it back, because they're copying a lot of stuff we're doing. In fact, it's our policy. That's the point I'm making. The best form of compliment is flattery, imitation, copying. I have no problem with the plagiarism here.... In respect to Mr. McNeely, you've worked hard on this. We'll be supporting it; you can count on us to be there for you."

So I just want to say—

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Who said that?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I believe that was the member for Durham. So I appreciate your support; I appreciate your caucus support. This is the best way to go to conservation culture—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's always interesting. The member from Parry Sound-Muskoka is the appropriate

member whose remarks I'd like to reply to. He picked up a theme that's so critical and central to this debate: We need to have safe, reliable, affordable power.

The genesis of power in Ontario started with Sir Adam Beck about 100 years ago. His theme was "power at cost." What he meant was "power at any cost." We built Ontario, the greatest province in the country of Canada, the greatest country in the world, on affordable, reliable and safe energy.

What is wrong with this bill is the disconnect between good policy and good politics. We agreed with the idea of conservation. In fact, you could say we initiated thinking on conservation. I was part of an all-party select committee on the conservation and supply task force, where experts came before us. I can tell you: What they recommended is not what's in this bill. I can tell you, being a member who represents the riding of Durham, which is cherished with leaders in energy—the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, the first nuclear engineering program in all of Canada and all of North America.

The information that I'm sharing in goodwill with you, the members of government, is in the interest of getting it right. What I'm so disappointed in is, every time they get up, they read the speech that George Smitherman wrote for them. They really know not what they do or what trouble they're causing.

This bill, in its directives on green energy—we're in favour of that. Safe, reliable: It qualifies. What's missing is the truth. The truth is this: In all of the reports that we're reading, wind energy is 42 cents a kilowatt hour.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Wrong.

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes, it is. Your standard offer contract—there's another case of a member, from Algoma-Manitoulin, who doesn't know his own government policy. The standard offer is 42 cents—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I always pay close attention to the remarks of the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka. Let me say, a couple of Sundays ago I had the delight of playing on his line in a hockey game. I was playing left wing and the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka was playing right wing. It worked out very well. It was quite a delight to have the opportunity to play some hockey with the member, and the member from Durham was playing that day too.

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Yes, we were. We had lots of energy.

When you look at this bill, Bill 150—and the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka did reference a small company in my riding: Mr. Verway from Norwood. It's interesting when you take the opportunity to talk to some of these entrepreneurs, these small businesses that really see unlimited opportunities in Bill 150, particularly when it comes to solar generation and in the particular area that Mr. Verway is involved with. When you talk to the municipal leaders—and I did, at OGRA/ROMA—they are looking for opportunities, particularly for those landfill

sites. Because we have composting garbage, methane gas is a problem. Methane gas contributes to GHGs. They're looking for opportunities to put small generation sites on those old landfill sites to utilize that methane gas, turn it into electricity and put it into local grids. I know that there are many utilities across the province of Ontario that are still owned in the public interest by their respective municipalities and see this bill as a real golden opportunity to develop a whole variety of sources for the generation of electricity.

I had a chance to be in the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock not too long ago to work with our new member, Rick Johnson, in order to develop biogas opportunities—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

Questions and comments?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: They were so timely that this morning we passed Bill 108, the Apology Act, because now this government will have a venue for being able to apologize for all these goofs that have been made and will be made over the next couple of years—this being one of the most regrettable, unless the government will listen and make some amendments that the opposition is suggesting, the stakeholders are suggesting and the public is suggesting. There's a lot of angst about this bill right now.

Who can argue with green? Who can argue with that? But just because you label something green doesn't mean it's so. As I've said, that's more symbolism than substance. You have to really be able to prove that the bill is about green.

1630

The mandatory energy audit that will cost \$300 is of great concern to my residents. I've received scores and scores of e-mails trying to understand how this will work and whether it will work. The mandatory energy audits will create jobs, but they will be inspection jobs—"toaster police" as we call them. We really feel that those aren't the kinds of jobs that this government ought to be creating in this economic downturn.

Instead of talking about the economy, we're talking about wind power; wind power that will create 1.5% of this province's energy. That's all—1.5%. So why are we talking about this at this time, when we should be talking about the economy? I would hope that this government will make changes before this bill passes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Parry Sound-Muskoka, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to respond to the members from Ottawa-Orléans, Durham, Peterborough and Burlington. I won't make any comments about the prowess of the member from Peterborough at the hockey game last week, but I would like to for a moment just talk about the changes this bill brings about with the Ontario Energy Board Act.

That's something I'm very concerned about. The Ontario Energy Board is the regulator, and their powers are

being broadened. I'm concerned; I think it's a mistake. Specifically, section 26 of the Ontario Energy Board Act has changed so that the OEB assumes a new regulatory role, to assess incremental conservation costs and allocate them to a class of customers. That means that the cost of some of the programs for conservation that the government comes up with are going to be basically taxed on all the ratepayers out there. But also, as I say, the powers of the OEB are being taken away from the role of regulator and getting into other things that I'm not sure they should be getting into as the regulator.

Also in this bill—I didn't get a chance to talk about it, but there are sweeping new powers that go to Minister Smitherman, the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, all kinds of new directive powers, powers to override municipal bylaws, which I'm sure people who are opposed to some developments are concerned about. Those are other aspects of this bill that certainly are a consideration.

Number one, though, I think is, what is it going to do to the cost for consumers and industry in this province? We need reliable energy, we need sustainable energy, and we need it at a competitive cost so our province can succeed.

Mr. John O'Toole: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: In my remarks to the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka, I had misspoken. I said that the cost of wind was 42 cents per kilowatt hour. In fact, I should have said the cost of solar is 42 cents and the cost of wind is about 12 cents per kilowatt hour. Thank you for correcting that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd just like to comment on a few issues today. I'd recommend to everyone in the House, if they didn't see it already, that they read an article that was in the National Post today called "The Crumbling Case for Green." I'm going to be the contrarian for a change. The only green I used was in my notes here that I'm going to use.

Anyway, this gentleman here wrote this: "Voters should ask politicians one simple question"—get past all the rhetoric—"Why do you want to raise my energy prices?" Since the one issue on which there truly is consensus is that Kyoto would have had little or no impact on global temperatures, it is a question for governments around the world, not least that of the government of Ontario, which has just introduced its draconian Green Energy Act." This expert "noted using the UN's own figures, that global warming was by no means the threat conventionally portrayed. Indeed, the UN even acknowledged its benefits, although to establish that fact you had to read the documents 'like a lawyer.'"

Some of the questions we have—and I've heard from my constituents—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, we've got to talk with Doug Chalmers and see what he has. I know he'll have an opinion on it. I'm sure the honourable member from Eglinton is going to find out for me on that.

The minister said that the cost for the first three years will be \$5 billion, and he said that would only represent a 1% increase to ratepayers with the bills “all in.” Our calculations say that \$5 billion paid by 4.5 million metered electricity consumers is actually about \$1,200 per consumer. That is a full year’s worth of electricity for most residential consumers, or 100% of their annual bill. Spread out over three years, that’s at least a 30% increase. Calculated another way, electricity is a \$15-billion- to \$30-billion-a-year industry, so \$5 billion is between 15% to 30% of that. Over three years, that means actually a 5% to 10% increase, not 1%.

The minister also said that costs were increasing everywhere and that Ontarians should expect their electricity prices to go up. This is true. The costs are going up because of increased costs of material and labour, which will rise even more in Ontario due to the increase in the minimum wage. This legislation will also increase power prices exponentially beyond the worldwide inflationary increases that the minister was talking about, because it will mandate that the billing be focused on expensive wind and solar instead of low-cost natural gas cogeneration or clean coal, which can be achieved by installing scrubbers. We’ve got a good case in Sarnia-Lambton at the Lambton generating station—three of the cleanest units in North America.

It will also cause consumption to shift away from cheap, existing, already-built nuclear and hydroelectric power—which don’t require distribution and transmission upgrades because they’re already connected to the grid—to expensive new wind and solar power, which require expensive distribution and transmission upgrades in order to connect. This is because wind and solar are non-dispatchable, whereas nuclear and hydro are dispatchable or partly dispatchable. I know that if the member for Durham were here, o’tooole he could explain “dispatchable” and “non-dispatchable” better than me, but we’ll leave that to him later. This means that when demand is low and someone has to shut down their generating facility, these cheap nuclear and hydro stations will be ordered to shut down while the expensive wind and solar facilities will continue to operate. This represents no environmental benefit since nuclear and hydro have the same zero-carbon footprint as wind and solar.

The feed-in tariff will lead to more generation connected at the distribution level as opposed to the transmission level. This means that more upgrading work will have to occur at the distribution level that would not otherwise have been required—all at the ratepayers’ cost—because wind and solar resources and available land are usually located far away from demand centres. This power will still have to travel long distances across transmission systems. We will still need to pay for upgrades to the transmission system, so now we are going to be paying for two upgrades to two systems instead of one.

Because the feed-in tariff system allows anyone to connect anywhere, there is no impetus for system planning at all, meaning that system costs will be far higher

than they would have been under the RFP system, in which the OPA and the IESO could decide where on the system it makes sense for generation to be built. All these acronyms make me think of “Old MacDonald had a farm, e-i-e-i-o.” But that’s beside the point.

A feed-in tariff means that everyone who wants to build and sell power can do so without any need to compete or justify the price. The point of having a competitive market for electricity is to compel generators to find efficiencies, to reduce their costs, keep their profit margins in line and ensure that Ontarians are only paying to build at the most competitive price. Prices are supposed to go down through competition, not up. For examples, see the phone, long-distance and Internet markets. But this act eliminates all competition and ensures that prices can only go one way: up, not down.

As far as funding government programs, this government has figured out a good way to play a fancy shell game with funds so it doesn’t look like the taxpayer at the end of the day is footing the bill. The new section 26.1 of the Ontario Energy Board Act compels the OEB to force suppliers such as Enbridge, Union Gas and the IESO to reimburse the government for the costs of these programs. Enbridge, Union and others in turn are allowed to recover these costs from all gas and electricity customers on their monthly bills. So at the end of the day, regular Ontarians end up paying the increased costs of these new programs but the government gets to call them “self-funding” and avoid the embarrassment of having to raise taxes. In a sense, this is a new tax. No matter how they want to cut it, it’s a new tax.

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In short, the McGuinty government didn’t want to have to raise taxes directly to pay for these projects, so instead they are saving face by forcing these poor gas and electric companies to raise their rates. At the end of the day, Ontarians know that whether it’s on their tax bill, gas bill or hydro bill, they are the ones paying for these pet projects.

For funding of local projects, the act allows local distribution utilities, most of which are owned by local municipalities, to invest in green energy projects up to 10 megawatts. The costs of these projects will not be paid by the local residents. Instead, local residents’ bills will be frozen and the costs will be paid by all consumers across Ontario. Therefore, there will be no accountability for project costs.

It used to be that if a municipal utility—often governed by local city councillors or PUC members—failed to spend wisely, the local municipal taxpayers would pay the price. But now, local councillors and local utilities can make all the poor spending decisions they want and will never be held directly accountable to local residents, because the costs of these overruns and decisions will be paid for by you and me and the rest of the consumers in the province, who don’t have the opportunity to vote for these councillors and PUC members.

The bureaucracy that’s created by this new act is called the Renewable Energy Facilitation Office. It

wasn't enough to have Hydro One, the OEB, IESO, OEFC, ESA, OPA and the CCO; now they have created the REFO. All these acronyms, to me, are just one way of clouding the issue and making it more complicated for the individual to look at the issues like this and to oppose them.

Under "jobs," the minister cannot estimate how many megawatts of green energy projects will be developed. In fact, this new program, as opposed to the RFPs and standard offers of the past, gives no centralized control or planning ability. Yet he is able to estimate that this unknown level of activity will, in his words, create 50,000 jobs.

The minister says that more than 40% of these 50,000 jobs will be associated with the construction of new transmission and upgrades of distribution lines. These are short-term, temporary jobs. Important as they are, at the end of the day they're not as important as the manufacturing jobs we have lost and will continue to lose as the price of energy increases in this province.

I could go on at great length, and I will—

Interjection: More.

Mr. Robert Bailey: More? Okay, they want more. All right.

I hesitate to get back into this—I know it's not popular to not be green—but I read this article, and again, I encourage everybody in the Legislature to read this article by Peter Foster. He says that "the editor of the influential ... network" said "that the green movement was collapsing in Europe and becoming increasingly unpopular as its enormous costs and minimal results were becoming apparent. The attempt to 'rebrand' Europe as the 'Environmental Union' had fallen apart and was now causing increasing discord both between and within countries."

President Obama has ponied up for solar and wind power, but these jobs had produced enormous costs with no benefits and are now falling apart. Green jobs were calculated not only to cost around half a million euros a pop; they came at the expense of two normal jobs. And they were now disappearing as the renewables bubble burst.

Who knows? I don't know whether that's going to happen in Ontario, but it's good reading, anyway; it's kind of something different. I'm tired of this other stuff we've been hearing for so long.

Anyway, those are my remarks. I look forward to the rest of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I frankly don't know where to start. I guess I could start by talking a little bit about the expertise of individuals like Sir Nicholas Stern, who had an opportunity to quantify the costs associated with doing nothing to respond to climate change.

I could talk about the significant body of research and literature done to quantify the costs associated with the air pollution associated with generating electricity from coal, which is a cheap form of generating electricity but a dirty form. But what I want to talk about more than

anything is that we do understand the importance of maintaining a reliable electricity system, of having a sustainable electricity system, and having one which has a mixed supply. We all need to think back to not too long ago to the days of the blackout across much of this province and how that brought to reality for us the fragility of our electricity system.

We expect that Ontario's supply mix, with a solid endowment of hydroelectric, which we have, low-variable-cost nuclear power, as well as a mixture of regulated and market rates, will continue to help us ensure that we have fair prices for energy users.

We know that we need to stop externalizing the cost of electricity and find ways to innovate, to develop new systems and to repair and refresh an old transmission grid. That is very much at the heart of the Green Energy Act, and it is the investment of \$5 billion to, among other things, rebuild and renew the transmission grid, where 41% of the 50,000 jobs that will be created as a result of this act will come from. Those are jobs that Ontarians need. Those are jobs that are needed in my community, in Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

I hope, when we have a vote on this bill, that we will see support by the members opposite.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I always listen when the member from Sarnia-Lambton is speaking, and I want to pick up on one of the themes. It's important to complement his remarks that are focused on our concerns with the bill. To add a bit of levity to it, I think he mentioned, "It's not easy being green," because this is the Green Energy Act. That reminded me of the famous Kermit the Frog. In fact, I think Kermit the Frog should be their theme, because this thing is hopping around on them and it's out of control.

Quite honestly, we know, and the people of Ontario—you the voters—know, that this is another government plan: "I'm government, and I'm here to help you." Lock the door, because quite frankly, here's what's happening. They're saying everything smarmy about green and the little wind turbines and solar panels and things on people's roofs and stuff like that. What you should look at is in the mailbox. Open the envelope and you'll see that the bill is going to double. That's what this bill is about. It's talking about green, like Kermit the Frog, but at the end of the day what they're going to bring on the grid is energy that is—I've got to get this right because I've had to correct the record for myself: In my riding there was a standard offer solar power contract issued to a small company called Watts Up Solar. They signed a contract for 42 cents a kilowatt hour that they're selling onto the grid today as we speak, and they're buying it back for 5.6 cents. In other words, when you buy energy off the grid today, it's 5.6 cents. Where's the difference being made up? Well, look in one of your other pockets, because at the end of the day, the taxpayer is paying. Premier McGuinty, with all due respect, doesn't have any money to lower the cost of energy, to make our roads

safer, to build hospitals. He's going to get it from you by raising the price. Don't be fooled by the name of the bill; Kermit the Frog is right.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I did listen intently to the remarks by my good friend the member from Sarnia-Lambton, and I think the member from Sarnia-Lambton actually grew up in a small community called Corunna, Ontario. I can certainly tell that there will be many small businesses in that fine community of Corunna, just outside Sarnia, that will be taking advantage of business opportunities that are clearly presented in Bill 150.

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I hear the member from Durham trying to heckle me there a bit. I just reviewed a speech that he made about a month or so ago in this House, and he certainly was very supportive of the private member's bill that was brought forward by the member from Ottawa-Orléans. He even said that the Leader of the Opposition, John Tory, was in support of that bill, which is kind of interesting. I know this was an issue in the by-election. Rick Johnson was going from door to door in Bobcaygeon and Fenelon Falls and Minden, and up in Haliburton county—

Mr. Mike Colle: Pontypool. Don't forget Pontypool.

Mr. Jeff Leal: —and Pontypool, his home area. He was talking to the people about this Green Energy Act and talking to them about opportunities for that farm community.

The Callaghan farm, outside Lindsay, has just put in a biogas operation from the manure from their milking operation, a very successful showcase opportunity: new business for the farm community to create a revenue stream for that area. Our Green Energy Act was one of the decisive factors in rallying the people in Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock to look for a new vision in the province of Ontario, and one of the ways they're going to achieve it is through Bill 150.

The member from Sarnia-Lambton is talking about a number of good things in that bill, and we really appreciate that as he starts his leadership campaign.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Didn't the member for Durham already speak?

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): No, I think you already commented.

Questions and comments?

The member for Sarnia-Lambton, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Robert Bailey: There's so much to say against this bill and so little time to do it in that you should let us have a little more time, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure in your magnanimous heart you could do that and you'd ordin-

arily do that, but anyway, I know you're governed by the orders of the House.

I'd like to thank the members from Etobicoke-Lakeshore and Durham, and of course my good friend from Peterborough. I'm going to go up to Bobcaygeon sometime this summer and visit up there. He said he'd host me; I think that's what he said. I'm not sure of that; I'll get that in writing, maybe.

Anyway, down our way we've got the Lambton generating station. I was contacted just recently by the Sarnia Construction Association and also the local building trade, and that's their concern. With clean-coal technology, they could produce coal for four cents a kilowatt hour. With the wind as an energy source, it's 10 to 15 cents, and solar is 42 cents a kilowatt hour.

My only concern is that there are a lot of details in this bill. There are some draconian regulations in there where they're going to give warrantless entry and a number of other things. That's why we want to get this bill to committee, where we can make improvements to it.

As the member for Durham says, it ain't easy being green. It's hard to stand up here and argue the contrarian remarks, but I think there will be more articles like there were in the National Post today as people start to see that maybe this bill isn't all it's cracked up to be. I've heard from municipal leaders already and people in the rural community who are concerned about what the impacts will be on their community.

I look forward to that debate that comes forward. We'll see what Doug Chalmers from my riding has to say. I know that the member from Eglinton wants to know what he's got to say. He always asks me, and I'll have to let him know that again we're using his name here.

Anyway, thank you. I look forward to the rest of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: It would seem that I'm the last speaker today, and as Henry VIII said to his wives, I won't keep you long.

A hero of mine, Yogi Berra, once said, "If you don't know where you're going, you won't know when you get there." I really get the feeling about this bill that we don't know where we're going. I don't think this is a plan; it's a number of alternative energies that could be encouraged, most of which are intermittent. What happens if the whole thing falls? There is no plan. We don't know where we're going; the McGuinty government doesn't know. Bill 150 is not a plan. It merely encourages some forms of energy, and, quite frankly, in many cases they're very expensive forms of energy. It will impact your hydro bills severely.

A couple of unintended consequences—well, they're not unintended; I guess they were thought of. All of a sudden, gas-generated hydro plants are springing up all across Ontario, not to produce electricity on a permanent basis but merely to supplement the energy at such times when more is required than is being produced by the

various forms of generation that we have going. One of those will, of course, be solar—when it is cloudy, it will not be producing; it's an intermittent form of energy—and wind, similarly. I just had some people in, as a matter of fact. We have one station already planned for our municipality of Cambridge and North Dumfries, a city of approximately 130,000 people. As explained to me, the gas generation plants—which, by the way, are relatively clean but still leave the problem of carbon emissions unanswered. These turbines are in the manner of a jet engine. They're supposed to be relatively quiet, and we've had no concerns raised by residents where the first one has been located, but it could be that we now have a second one, because there are tenders out. They must be sprouting up right across this province. People probably just don't know it's happening, but in fact it is happening.

When we talk about wind and solar—every time I was in Europe, I was especially impressed as we sailed along the coast of Denmark and saw windmill after windmill. That was over 10 years ago. They are a clean form of energy; however, they are intermittent and must be supplemented by these jet engines which we're now going to have across the province. They will be emitting carbon, so that problem has not been solved.

The impact of this bill: I'll just deal with the impact of the audit of energy on housing. When I was visiting Florida last year, I was in a subdivision in a municipality known as Cape Coral. It was really sad, because this was a relatively new subdivision built within the last seven or eight years, and row after row of houses were vacant. As a matter of fact, many of them had furniture and garbage piled up on their front lawns because they had been abandoned.

We have not to date suffered this kind of violence—and that's the only word to describe it—because these empty homes, each one, had a tragic story of a family who made their home in that particular piece of real estate and were being evicted by foreclosure or power of sale or whatever legal means. They had lost their homes. As I mentioned, this was a subdivision of maybe a thousand homes, and half of them, from drive-bys, were vacant. There were a lot of tragic stories there. Canada usually follows the United States sometime later—I always figured eight months to a year—but hopefully, we will not meet that kind of tragedy that I observed at that time.

One of the reasons that foreclosures are so prevalent in the US is that most mortgages are without recourse. I didn't realize that until relatively recently. In Canada, if you buy a home and you sign the mortgage, you're responsible for that amount of money whatever happens to that home. So when they come around and do a power of sale on the home and sell it to someone else after you have vacated, if there's a deficiency, if they didn't sell it for enough, you could be sued for that deficiency. That's what happens in Canada, except for one province, I believe.

In the United States, their mortgages are without recourse, so somebody buying a home in that subdivision,

for instance, with nothing down—and in many cases they had balloon mortgages and all sorts of funny financing. When the value of the home drops, the individual merely walks away from the property. He cannot be sued for the deficiency. They're not responsible for the mortgage. You see, a mortgage is made up of a promissory note and a lien on the land, so in Canada you're sued on the promissory note—"I promise to pay \$100,000 on the mortgage." In the States, they just walk away from it, and that's what they did in this subdivision.

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We are in a different classification. However, we do have some bad things happening within our economy. We are the largest customer with the United States; they buy most of our manufactured goods, especially. We do have a severe downturn in our manufactured goods. We are losing good-paying jobs. The auto workers are losing jobs. In my municipality of Cambridge, we are very fortunate to have a very powerful automobile maker in Toyota and Lexus, located—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'm sure the member from Cambridge is going to get back to Bill 150. He's tying this in.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I certainly am.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Okay. Thank you.

Interjections.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: The point, as the Speaker pointed out—he took up some of my time; I'd like that back. I have less than two minutes to go.

The point I was making is that in these times of trial and tribulation to our economy and to our citizens, who are now concerned with the loss of jobs, to impose a mandatory energy audit is extremely poor timing. It may be a good idea, and under different circumstances and at a different time, I wouldn't be standing here discussing it, but this is a particularly bad time. I would not like to see happen in the real estate field here the type of tragedy that I saw in some parts of the United States. I would not like to see people losing their homes, real estate slowing down to such an extent that property values start to drop drastically, as in so many places in the world: in Spain, in the UK, in the United States of America. We're surrounded by dropping real estate values, and we've been fortunate, to date, to avoid massive drops. However, we must ensure, under the circumstances, that we do not in any way impede real estate transactions, and I believe that is one of the unfortunate unintended consequences of this particular bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for ensuring that I was speaking on point.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to comment on the comments by the member from Cambridge. Certainly the current economic situation demands aggressive government response in terms of economic stimulus and job creation, and the green economy and the Green Energy Act are going to do just that: some \$5 billion, at mini-

mum, in terms of investments, the creation of at least 50,000 jobs, the development of new areas of technology, new supply chains, new manufacturing sectors. Those are all critical to put us on a good pathway forward.

I believe we are perhaps coming to the end of second reading debate, and I simply want to take a moment to thank all those who participated in the debate over the last many hours. It is an important process that takes place, and it allows us to listen to comments from the other side and then to have those comments reviewed at a committee of the Legislature, with the ultimate goal of making sure the legislation is better and improved as a result of the process.

For those of you who are concerned and have not had enough time to participate, I'll let you know that the bill continues to be posted on the EBR. It will go to committee, we expect, if it passes second reading. As regulations are to be developed, there would be more opportunity for participation, whether through the EBR in some instances or as government ministries seek public input with respect to that, particularly the work to be done by the Ministries of Environment and Natural Resources over the coming months as they re-examine the approvals process, including requirements for public consultations before a project is approved.

So there will be much more opportunity to comment on this important piece of legislation, but I do thank those who have participated in the debate over the last number of days.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I just have a general kind of level-one explanation here. When you look at energy—a very complex system. We have the generation side in my riding of Durham. Most of the nuclear baseload is in my riding of Durham. There's the supply mix thing. There's the generation, then there's the transmission, then there's the distribution and then there's the consumer.

In fact, it's my understanding that this bill in a general sense is trying to get more power onto the grid and a better grid to distribute the power. I understand that. It has all been studied. But where they're going wrong here is the way they're going about it. Just be straight with the people of Ontario. If I look at the introduction of the bill, there is \$5 billion more for this implementation plan, which is a number. Who's paying for it? The government is \$18 billion in deficit. The \$5 billion is going to be paid for by the consumers. There are 4.5 million consumers. That's \$1,200 each that you are going to pay in your bill—let's be straight with the people of Ontario—and it won't fix the system.

The system that you're designing is a variable generation source; it's like gas from a cow barn and—there is no plan here except, like Kermit the Frog said, "It ain't easy being green," and it ain't easy being green. Even Jan Carr, who is an academic, who was your appointee to the Ontario Power Authority—here's what Jan Carr said: "at most," in the supply mix report he issued, "up to 5% of the grid." Ten per cent would be 2,600 megawatts; they're forecasting 6,000 megawatts. Actually, with all

due respect to the minister and due respect to some of the speakers here today, it ain't easy being green. And they've got this thing so screwed up, pardon my language—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

Mr. John O'Toole: I seek unanimous consent to speak for another half an hour—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I think I heard a no before I even got to my feet.

Further questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I just want to thank everyone who participated in the debate; it has been a very interesting one.

I'd just like to make a couple of clarifications. The phasing in of the energy audits: Obviously, with the downturn in the economy and downturn in the building industry, we'll be speaking with interested stakeholders such as real estate agents and home builders to phase this in. There's no question that the original private member's bill in October had it phased in over many years, so that will be done.

Also, section 9 of the building code refers to small units, so we expect that small apartments, high-rise multi-unit buildings, condominiums, rental properties, co-op housing, heritage buildings and properties owned by First Nations could all be exempt, so that's going to be part of it, that whole discussion. Of course, a condo owner doesn't have the control that you do with your own unit.

The jobs that are going to be created by this are going to be jobs for plumbers, labourers, carpenters. We're going to have higher standards for our appliances, which will really help. We'll be able to go in and do the water upgrades that are necessary. There's assistance for the people who need that assistance. This is all going to be very good for conservation, very good for people saving money in their own homes; 25% of our energy is in our own homes. We can go in and get a 25% reduction of that, and there would be paybacks in short periods for people. The cost of renewing our electricity infrastructure: That's the grid dollars. We're moving towards a 21st-century grid and a 21st-century supply mix that are expected to increase electricity prices to ratepayers approximately 1% annually over the next 15 years.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I wanted to comment on a number of the remarks, especially by the member from Cambridge. He took us on a wide, circuitous route and brought us back to the Green Energy Act. I was thinking, when he was talking about green, about the green in people's wallets when they can't afford those homes. That's what we need to think of. At the end of the day, like that guy said in that column, ask: "Why are you putting up my energy costs?" Ask your government MPPs: "Why are you putting up my energy costs?" That's the bottom line; that's what we need to be concerned about.

There's another article here, by Terence Corcoran. You don't usually get time to read these articles around here. The only time even I get a chance to see something in here is when I come to question period. The rest of the time I'm busy all the time. Anyway, he says that this act is just "the latest in green police state thinking. It's modelled on the war on tobacco and the war on drugs: the war on carbon."

"The tobacco model is an acknowledged inspiration for Ontario Energy Minister George Smitherman. 'Like the Smoke-Free Ontario Act that came before it,' he said in a speech, 'the GEA will build on municipal leadership, uploading responsibilities to Queen's Park.' That's green talk for a major power grab. From Queen's Park, green police will be dispatched across the province, armed with 'uploaded' powers, to search out energy inefficiency and carbon abuse, and to invade homes in search of unregulated appliances and illegal beer fridges."

That's where we're going. That's what we need to watch for. At the end of the day, we need to ask the members, "Why are we putting up our energy prices?" That's what the main question is going to be. "The main target, though, appears to be businesses—buyers, sellers, lessors, manufacturers—who may be trafficking in these illegal appliances or engaging in practices" that are nefarious and "contrary to mandatory conservation and energy efficiency laws."

Just before I close, if the members would allow that we have the member for Durham do another 30 minutes, I'm sure he could do it without any notes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Cambridge, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I'd like to thank each of those who have commented on the—

Mr. John O'Toole: Share your time with me.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I'd like to share my time with the member for Durham. In any event I'd like to thank the member for Durham for his—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): You may like to but you can't.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: Exactly; I knew that.

I'd like to thank the member for Durham for his comments, the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore, the member for Ottawa-Orléans and the member for Sarnia-Lambton.

I was reading the introduction of this bill made by the Deputy Premier and Minister of Energy on February 23: "Since 2003, the government of Ontario has been moving forward with the most ambitious climate change initiative in North America: the elimination of coal."

I couldn't help but remember my days when I was learning to drive, and it was a car with a clutch. We were promised the closing of certain plants, and then they were put off. For every step we took, we got one forward and three back. That's the way I was when I was learning to drive with a clutch car. You'd move forward and hesitate and then stop. This government seems to be, in their energy plan—because they don't have a plan, they just seem to—

Mr. Robert Bailey: Double-clutch.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: —double-clutch. They seem to buck. They seem to be fighting it all the way. They talk about this ambitious initiative, but they've, of course, failed at that ambition. They've failed on every promise they've made in regard to the closing of the plants, because they're still going strong, unfortunately without scrubbers, as they should have had.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? Does any other member wish to speak?

Mr. Smitherman has moved second reading of Bill 150. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I would ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): So ordered.

Orders of the day?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House is adjourned until Thursday, March 12, at 9 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1714.

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First Session, 39th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
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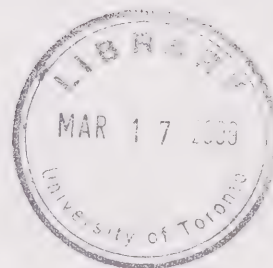
Première session, 39^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 12 March 2009

Jeudi 12 mars 2009



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 12 March 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 12 mars 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a Buddhist prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT ACT (ORGAN DONOR LEAVE), 2009 LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI (CONGÉ POUR DON D'ORGANE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 10, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 154, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of organ donor leave / Projet de loi 154, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé pour don d'organe.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I have but a few minutes left of the one hour permitted me to address this matter. I'm especially looking forward to the comments today by the member from Parkdale-High Park, Ms. DiNovo, who is passionate about this issue of organ donation, who has advocated on behalf of her own constituents who have been in need of organs and who has joined that broad, growing movement that wants to turn the organ donation culture on its head, that wants to create a whole new culture where we treat organ donation as benignly as we would treat giving blood at a Red Cross clinic, where we accommodate living donors—which is why the NDP are going to vote for the bill. But this bill in and of itself isn't going to increase the number of organs by any substantial amount, if any amount, going to people on those waiting lists.

If we're going to get serious about ending that waiting list, if we're going to get serious about those 1,700 people a year, including kids, waiting and facing death in the face on a daily basis and dying on those waiting lists, then we adopt the models that have been adopted throughout most of Europe, including Israel, and we adopt a model—rather than the one that exists now, rather than the status quo, which is presumed denial, we say the default position should be what most Ontarians

believe, and we know that most Ontarians believe that their organs should be used to save a life after their death; as simple, short and sweet as that.

We comment again that once you're dead, your organs are but dead weight for the pallbearers. Once you're dead, your organs are of no use to you whatsoever. God doesn't want your organs; if you believe in God, he or she wants your soul. As we're speaking, good organs are being burned and buried, this very morning here in the province of Ontario, organs that could well have saved a kid's life, a young mother's life or indeed perhaps some middle-aged person like I am and more than a few of you are, too.

Presumed consent: Let's grab the bull by the horns. This government should be showing leadership. The illustration of so many European countries demonstrates that once you create presumed consent, you create a totally different attitude and perspective and culture around organ donation, and the public will follow.

It's such a delight to be able to address the matter. I wish I had more time, on the last day of our pages' work here at Queen's Park. I know Patrick's parents are here; I talked to them downstairs. Of course they're here. I know Alexander's parents are here. I'm sure other folks are showing up. I just want to tell your parents, because that will tell you as well, that you've been as delightful a group of bright, talented young women and men as have ever worked here as pages. So all of us over here wish you well. We know you're going to do well. You've demonstrated that each and every one of you has incredible potential. Enjoy your spring break; enjoy the rest of your school year. Look forward to better funding for your secondary years and even better funding for your post-secondary years. We'll be reading about you in the papers when you, as doctors, lawyers, engineers, veterinarians and, yes, politicians, do great things.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to rise and enter the debate on Bill 154. I want to congratulate the member from Welland. No one can argue that the member has a great passion for organ donations, the whole strategy about it; no one can argue that. We have had the opportunity and the privilege to hear the member speak on this on many occasions.

I speak in favour of Bill 154 today simply for this reason: It's all part of a strategy. It's part of a strategy of increasing the ability for organ transplants to become a possibility for those people who are waiting. We can only imagine what that must be like if it's your child or if it's

yourself. The agony of waiting for an organ donation—I can't imagine what that would be like. It would be such a difficult journey. So when we have the opportunity to speak about it, part of the conversation has to be of how important it is for all of us, that we take ownership and we donate our organs as well and we lead by example.

Certainly, the member from Welland has spoken on it on many occasions, and I do want to congratulate him and thank him for the work he has done. I also want to thank a lady from my riding who has done a tremendous amount of work, Anne Miller. She has been, I tell you, a very, very strong advocate. When she had the—I'm trying to think of how one would word it. When her son was killed in a car accident and she was able to donate so many organs to help other children, I just can't believe how difficult a decision that would have been for her. But she tells the story. She is a strong advocate, and I personally wanted to thank Anne and the member from Welland for all of their hard work.

0910

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The member speaks eloquently about the need for transplants and organ tissue, and he's absolutely right. There needs to be a change of culture. I'm not sure the Ontario public is quite ready for that change in culture, but that is the solution to this huge problem that we have.

He also speaks glowingly of the job that the pages do here. I always thought that whoever came up with the idea that pages should be serving in the House made a very wise decision, particularly in the ages of the pages, in grades 7 and 8—12 or 13 years old, are you?—somewhere in that ballpark.

As we're debating issues that face Ontarians, and perhaps most of our debate centres around issues that will face Ontarians, if not immediately, certainly within the next four or five years, it always gives us pause—it gives me pause, anyway—when I see the pages here and I think, "Well, how will this affect them in their lives to come?" Their very presence gives us a different dimension of thought when we're talking about the long-term effects of some of the issues that we discuss. So I've always thought it was a very wise decision that young adults of this age should be the pages in the House.

I remember when my grandfather was here—my grandfather served in the Legislature from 1919 to 1959. That was a long time ago. He was always very fond of the pages as well and would encourage them to be adventurous in their time here—I know you have been adventurous in your time here—and also in their lives to come. So I pass that on to you as well. Thank you.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to congratulate the member from Welland for his incredible, strong advocacy on this issue for quite a long time. He and George Marcello have been on a cross-country tour to talk about the need for people to donate organs, and he has been doing it for years and years, almost alone for much of that time.

I want to say that I agree with the member from Welland when he speaks badly of Bill 154, organ donor leave, as a way to deal with the problem of organ donation. This is but a little measure of what is desperately needed. The government says, "Yes, this is something we need to do as part of the way," but that is just a small measure of what needs to be done. It's clear we need to do more, and that's what the member from Welland has been saying for quite a long time.

I'm telling you that the public is more ready for this than they are for the Liberal initiative that's coming soon to harmonize the PST and the GST tax collection. There are going to be more attacks on that initiative coming from men and women and families than about their desire to give away their organs to help somebody else live.

That's what this is about. This is but a little initiative. You give somebody a leave for donating an organ. That's fine; that's good. It just is inadequate in terms of meeting the needs of thousands of people who are dying and waiting for an organ to be donated.

The member from Welland speaks about presumed consent. You give consent unless you say no. That's the way it should be, and those who feel strongly about it can say no. This would save lives, and that's the direction we need to move in.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I had the chance and the privilege to listen to the member from Welland in the last couple of days, I believe, and today, finishing his one-hour speech about organ donation. I think it's a very important topic and all of us, not just in Canada, Ontario and North America but worldwide, are speaking about this issue because it's important to save lives. As he mentioned, when we die we don't need our organs. We don't need our parts. If they can be used to give somebody life, and the support to live a good life again, I think that is very important.

I remember a gentleman from my riding of London—Fanshawe who had a heart transplant done in London, and I think he survived for a long time. Sadly, he died a year ago, but he had the chance to live almost 11 years. He got married and had kids, and in the end he died. But whoever donated his heart to him gave him the chance to live 11 years. I think that's very important, especially since when we die, we don't need our parts. I think that's a very important step and I want to congratulate him and his advocacy in this regard. I wish all of us can come and support this small step, this small measure.

As you know, last week, or maybe this week, the United States again permitted their scientists to work on stem cells. I think it's going to affect Canada very well when we talk about stem cells and research innovation and many different things. And when we talk about organ donations and natural parts, we don't have to do anything. It just comes naturally. We donate it to someone who needs it badly.

I want to congratulate the member for Welland. I wish you all the luck and success. I also want to congratulate the Minister of Labour for his efforts and endeavours in this regard.

And before I leave—I have 10 seconds—I want to wish all the pages good luck. Hopefully they've learned good habits from this place. I also want to thank the parents who give them the support to be here. I wish you all success and luck in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Now we go back to the member for Welland, who has his opportunity to respond.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I thank all the people who responded. I think what it signals is that there is a clear passion in this chamber, in this Parliament, to proceed dramatically to improve the availability of organs. I close anticipating the critics, because I get the e-mails from the cranky people after I talk about presumed consent. They e-mail me: "You want my organs?" You bet your boots I want your organs. I want as many organs as we can get. We have the capacity to eliminate the waiting list here in the province of Ontario and, indeed, to help hundreds of others across Canada. So yes, I want your organs.

Two: Do I treat the matter rather trivially? Yes, because it's a rather trivial thing to give an organ when you no longer need it. That's not a gift. You're dead. I'm going to the tattoo parlour and I'm getting a dotted line up my belly and a little note that says, "Upon death, open here. Take what you need, if you can use it." And take the '94 Chev pickup parked down there in Welland in front of 121 Bald Street, because I'm dead. I don't have any use for that either.

They're only organs. Most of us eat them. Not our own of course, not people's, but cows'. We eat kidney, we eat liver, we eat tripe. They're just organs. Stop this bizarre fixation with the fact that they're yours or they're mine, you can't take them. You're dead. There is no you left. There is no me left.

Let's start saving lives here in the province of Ontario. We can show leadership and set a standard for the rest of Canada. There are two and a half years left of this government, of this Parliament. We could do it within those two and a half years and show true leadership. This government can leave a real legacy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jeff Leal): Further debate? The member for Parkdale-High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: You got it right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an honour to stand. First of all, I want to say how really blessed we are with the member for Welland, Peter Kormos, who is coming up to 20 years of public service. He deserves applause for that—20 years of public service coming up in April of this year.

And certainly, I want to thank the pages for all of their hard work. It's been amazing.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Hey, Cheri, we should have a party for him.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Yes, we are having a party for him—certainly we are—in Welland. It will probably be a day off in Welland, I'm sure.

And for the pages, for all their hard work, and their parents, of course, who have allowed us to experience them here; it's been a great blessing as well.

You know, this is such a tiny step where such a large step is needed. Sometimes I wonder about this government. It's almost as if the McGuinty Liberals—if Queen's Park were on fire, instead of putting out the fire, they would be off-site somewhere writing up legislation about using more fire-retardant materials. That's what this step is in terms of the huge catastrophe that the situation of organ donation is in our province—and it is a catastrophe. It's a catastrophe. We have 1,700 people waiting on a list. It's life or death for them. They're waiting, they're taking up hospital beds; they're waiting for organs that aren't there. A hundred of them die on those waiting lists every single year. I call that a catastrophe: 100 deaths a year in Ontario alone waiting for organs that are not there when the answer is right before us.

0920

The answer is in the bill put forward by the member from Welland. The answer is presumed consent. What does that mean? Presumed consent simply means that upon your death, it is presumed that you wish to donate your organs unless you sign a card stipulating otherwise. That's what this is about. You know, we've done advertising campaigns; there have been thousands—millions—of dollars spent. I know Trillium Gift of Life has done everything they can to try to up the number of donors. We in this Legislature have to finally admit it isn't working. Nothing is working. We've tried it all, my friends, and nothing is working. There are 1,700 people waiting; 100 deaths a year. It isn't working. You know, "crazy" is continuing to do things over and over again when they didn't work in the past. That's what we're doing here.

What we're doing now, with this bill, is saying, "Well, you can take time off. You should be allowed by law to take time off to donate your organ if you're living." Please. Show me an example of some employer who won't give their employee time off to donate an organ or a part of an organ to someone else. I mean, Mr. Scrooge himself would have given Bob Cratchit time off to donate part of an organ. I would love to meet such an employer. In fact, the government hasn't brought forward any examples of employers or employees who would be affected by this bill. Much more meaningful, of course, which isn't in the bill, would be to pay people for the time they take off—much more meaningful. That's not even here. And quite frankly, even if it were, it would only be an inch, an inch toward what we need. What we need is presumed consent.

You know, this whole issue was brought before me in a very real way by one of my constituents, Andres Cotic. Mr. Cotic is a phenomenal person. He was in the hospital when he called my constituency office. He said that he had been waiting for a liver transplant, at that point, for months, and he was going to die if he didn't get one. He had already had part of a liver transplanted, donated by an incredibly generous co-employee. That was 25 years ago, but the situation continued; it was a progressive disease, and he needed a whole new liver. I don't know if all the members remember this, but he made the front page of the Toronto Sun when we brought him down to

Queen's Park with his family, begging and pleading with this government to bring in presumed consent—begging and pleading with them for his very life. There was no response. Thank God Ontarians are more generous than the McGuinty Liberals. Because of the publicity, Mr. Cotic got his liver, but only because of the publicity and only because Ontarians will do what's right if they're given half a chance.

I would really challenge anybody watching this, anybody who is out of the loop in terms of organ donation, who hasn't really thought about it lately—quite frankly, most Ontarians don't until the need is theirs or until the need is for someone they love. I challenge them, even if they have filled out an organ donor card, to put their hands on it right away. Under the system that the member from Welland quite frankly and very honestly and very realistically defined as presumed denial, under our system, you have to have the card filled out. How many of us walk around in life with an organ donor card in our pocket or on our person? What would happen if we were to die and they couldn't find the organ donor card? It's a very simple reality; it happens all the time.

I don't walk around with one. I think, quite frankly, it's in my car right now near my driver's licence. So, unless I die in my car, it's not going to be on my person, and I challenge anybody in this House to show me their organ donor card on their person. If they were to be hit by a car crossing the lanes on University, who would know that they'd signed one? That's the situation we have now.

Now, it doesn't hit home unless there's someone in your family who really needs it, just like giving blood. Giving blood is a perfect analogy to organ donation. This, after all, is part of your body: your blood. No less so, no more so than your organs. Giving blood is a no-brainer now. We all do it. Nobody—well, outside of a few—has an objection to it. We give blood because we know it saves lives, and, quite frankly, we don't care about it much anymore. There was a time, of course, when these kinds of discussions went on around giving blood. We've moved past them because we know it saves lives. We're past them as well when we know that organs save lives.

Over 50% of Ontarians would agree with a presumed-consent bill. To the members who say we're not there yet, the members should know that poll: Over 50% of Ontarians say yes to presumed consent. So Ontarians are there. They want this option. Why are the McGuinty Liberals stalling what most Ontarians want, particularly those who are in line and who are waiting?

Now, many of you know that my background is as a United Church minister, and so my truck was always with members of other faiths and members of my own. I went to a wonderful breakfast hosted by the Trillium Gift of Life Network at which members of all faiths were present. There were imams, rabbis, temple priests, Buddhists and Christians. There were a plethora of religious there, all of whom support the gift of life, the gift of life simply being something that I think and I know most

Ontarians support. Speaking as a Christian, we hearken to a Saviour whose gift to the world was his body. In the Eucharist, we celebrate the gift of Christ as the gift of his body. Surely that's a theological imperative upon every Christian across the province of Ontario to be generous with their body, and here is a classic case where the gift of one's body is the gift of life to someone else.

It's just that direct. The Trillium Gift of Life Network knows this, we know this, Ontarians say they know this and want this. The government won't give it to them. The McGuinty Liberals won't deliver what the vast majority of Ontarians and faith leaders want. You will always find, my friends, someone, somewhere, who objects, and objects vociferously, to the right thing to do. That doesn't mean you don't do it, particularly when, and again, I will keep coming back to these absolutely glaring and horrific statistics, 1,700 people are on the waiting list with 100 deaths every single year.

Now, those are just numbers, I know. But if it's somebody you know? To Andres Cotic's family, it was somebody they knew. It was their father, their loved one; it was someone they knew who was about to die because there was no liver available. When it's someone you know, then the issue becomes everything to you. We would be shocked and appalled—and we are shocked and appalled—if Ontarians didn't give blood. Why are we not shocked and appalled by the state of our current system?

0930

Again, under this state of presumed denial, where we assume that nobody wants to give their organs unless they indicate that they do, the member from Welland is quite right: Every day in the province of Ontario bodies are buried and burned, organs are buried and burned that could save lives. It's common knowledge around the House as well—and I want to take this opportunity to thank all of those who have come up to me and offered their best wishes for my husband's recovery. He had a heart attack while playing with the Legiskaters last week. He's fine, he's back to work and all is good. I want to thank you all, because I heard from all members, including the Premier, and I thank him as well for his best wishes.

But, again, when you have that kind of scare in your family, when you look at losing someone you love so much, had that been a case where somebody else's organ could have saved him, trust me, I would speak with no less vigour than I do standing here. Certainly anybody who has faced a life-or-death moment would wish that the medical personnel had all the tools they needed to save them.

Remember, we're not just talking about adults here; we're talking about children on those waiting lists. There are 1,700 people waiting for organ donations, and many of them are children—children. You should know that it's never too late to donate your organs. You could be 70 or 80 years old, and your organs could still be harvested. Imagine if you were an 88-year-old and your organ could be harvested to save a five-year-old. Would you not want that? I can tell you, from my years in ministry, I don't

think I would have ever talked to anyone who died peacefully at 88 who wouldn't have said, "Please, save the five-year-old. What difference does it make to me if my organs are buried or burned, when they could save the life of a five-year-old?" This is what we're up against, my friends. This is what we're up against. This is the horror of the present reality.

Now, it isn't everywhere. If you were lucky enough to be born in Italy or Austria or Israel, there and then presumed consent rules. There and then in many other countries in Europe, too many to mention—but it's interesting to mention particularly Italy, a very Roman Catholic country, and one could say faithful country, where presumed consent is the law. Israel is a very faithful country; one could say a very Jewish theologically based community. There, presumed consent is the law. If you were lucky enough to be born in either of those places, you wouldn't have a waiting list of 1,700 people waiting for donors. The donors would be there. The organs would be there. You wouldn't be forced to lie in a hospital bed for months waiting. You wouldn't have to carry a beeper around on you on the off chance that somebody might die who had signed an organ donor card. No. My friends, that's sanity. That is sanity.

Everything we have done to the present in this province around the issue of organ donation hasn't worked. That is not to detract from the good people who have tried so hard at Trillium Gift of Life and others, because they've tried, under a very bad system, to help people, and they have. I certainly want to give thanks to all of those people who, under this ridiculous system, have still managed to find donors and get them to donate so that lives can be saved. We celebrate that when we have breakfast with them. We celebrate that every year, the Trillium Gift of Life. But how sad is it? There's a sadness that goes with that breakfast, because you know, coming back to those ugly statistics again, that 1,700 people are still waiting, that 100 people a year are still dying. No matter how we celebrate the ones who were successful, we certainly have to, at the same time, mourn all of those who were not and who are not.

Again, I want to thank Andres Cotic and his family, because they really made the issue personal to me. When you see someone who is waiting for a liver transplant and witness somebody who is yellow and thin, and who is in a hospital on and on and doesn't want to be there and would rather be at home—think of the cost to our hospitals and our health care system of this current system of madness we have around organ donation. Think of all those beds that could be used by folk who have a chance of getting better and getting out, that instead are used by people who are failing slowly, waiting and waiting for organ donors to come forward. This is absurd. People around the world think our system in Ontario is absurd—worse than absurd. They think it's horrific.

Andres Cotic thought it was horrific when it faced him and he realized he might die because of our system in Ontario. He might die because we do not have presumed consent but a system of presumed denial. As I said,

nothing to try to increase the number of donors has worked enough to affect those horrific statistics—we have to admit it. And this bill isn't going to do it either; it's not going to do it.

As I said at the beginning, even Scrooge would let Bob Cratchit off to donate his organ to somebody who needed it if they had the system back then. Show me an employer who wouldn't give time off to an employee to donate an organ. They may not pay them, but that's not in this bill either. There's nothing in this bill that says you have to pay them. Most employers, especially in these economic times, would say, "Take the 13 weeks—can't pay you."

In a sense, this bill does very little. It does extremely little. It makes a nod in the direction. One can ask, why even bring this bill forward? Have done with it. Bring forward presumed consent; make this a reasonable jurisdiction like the others that have presumed-consent legislation.

One can only figure that they want to be on record. It's a photo op. They want to say something about organ donation. It's a popular topic, especially when somebody like Andres Cotic is on the cover of the *Toronto Sun*. Then it becomes a popular topic. They want to look like they're doing something, when in fact nothing is changed. Nothing is changed: 1,700 people on the waiting list; 100 deaths a year, deaths on our hands, deaths we could prevent with a simple stroke of the legislative pen, deaths we could prevent and we don't. We don't.

Imagine how this debate would look in Italy or Austria or Israel or any of the countries where presumed consent is the law—imagine. They would look at us as though we were neanderthals, as though we hadn't quite come into the 21st century yet. Again, that might be cute or not if it weren't that there are 1,700 on the waiting list and 100 deaths while waiting for organ donors.

I just want to conclude by thanking Trillium Gift of Life and praying that this government finally brings in presumed consent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I just want to bring this discussion back to what it's really intended to do. This bill is talking about trying to encourage live donors. We are looking at ways to make sure that people think about being a donor. In a way, that means a real sacrifice for themselves personally.

Last year, the Premier announced the Ontario organ donation strategy. Within that strategy is the program that reimburses people for the expenses they could incur if they look at donation as a possibility.

On Sunday, I came back to my apartment here in Toronto and found my sister and my niece there. It was a bit of a surprise. They had gotten my extra keys from my husband. Why were they there? Lindsey has a roommate whose mother has Wilson's disease, which is a disease of the liver, and Lindsey had volunteered to have herself tested as a donor. She spent the week at Toronto General here, and together she and her mom went through an

incredible number of tests to see if she was compatible. Each time the tests came back, she was further and further compatible. But yesterday, they found something that leaves her on the hold list; she's not completely compatible, and it's very critical in live donation that compatibility is there. For Lindsey, it means disappointment because she really wanted to do this.

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Lindsey is in her second year of university at Western. She made this decision because she has known this girl for a year and a half, and this is a young woman's mother whom she wanted to do this for. We want to encourage people to think about donation, but it is a gift, a sacrifice, that you have to want to make for someone else. I want to congratulate my niece for her really generous spirit. I know she makes my family proud.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I listened with interest to my colleague from Parkdale-High Park and the passion she brings to this debate, very particularly about the concept of presumed consent, which is the real nub of the discussion on the issue of organ donation.

What I find interesting about this bill is that it's like so many other aspects of Liberal government legislation that are introduced here. It's not that the bill is wrong; I'll vote for it. It is a piece of the puzzle; it's a small piece of the puzzle. It's more labour law than it is medical law. It basically says that if somebody is going to offer up the greatest gift that they can to another human being—an organ—they can get time off work. That's all well and good. It kind of reminds me of a constituent who came in last week on another piece of legislation, but very relevant in this context. It was a person taking advantage of the lifting of the mandatory retirement age of 65, but being denied her benefits because she has turned 70 and nobody bothered to look at an overall policy. That's what we're talking about here and I think that's what my friend from Parkdale-High Park is referring to.

If you're going to take up the issue of organ replacement in the general sense, and you want to explore that fully and the operation of organ replacement as it affects citizens who are both donors and recipients in the province of Ontario, then, indeed, that's what you have to do. You don't take one little piece of the puzzle and say, "Look how well we've done."

Presumed consent: I can take either side of that argument. I understand why people who are passionately in favour of presumed consent are so. That debate has been on simmer for the past five, 10 or more years and, as the member correctly points out, it's not simmering elsewhere. There are sides that have been drawn up and we can easily debate that. What I'd like to see going forward is legislation presented that covers the full policy, not just on this, but on anything we're given to debate in this Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I listened to the member from Parkdale-High Park carefully when she was talking

about this particular issue. I also listened to my colleague, the member from the Lambton area. She was speaking about the importance of the person who donates organs. We have to break the cultural and psychological barriers. We have to create that culture and encourage people to donate.

We also mentioned that a donation is a gift of life. We cannot force people to do it. I know this bill is talking about a small step, but it's a very important step, as the member from Thornhill mentioned, toward breaking the barriers and allowing people, if they want to donate something and they are working, to donate without losing their jobs.

As I mentioned when I spoke earlier, it's important to convince people to donate parts of their organs because it's a very important step in saving lives. Especially now, all of us around the globe are struggling to create research through stem cells in many different areas in order to create and grow tissues. If we have those tissues and organs with us that are fresh and natural, it would be a lot better, cheaper, easier and more convenient for many people to continue living among us and giving back to their communities and their nation. So I think this is a very important step.

I want to congratulate the Minister of Labour for breaking those barriers and allowing people to donate without being concerned about their jobs, and giving them the support they need in order to help someone. As my colleague mentioned earlier, people want to help. Canadians, Ontarians—they are generous people. We have to break those barriers for them, to give them that chance to give.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

I will return now to the member for Parkdale-High Park to reply.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I listened with interest to the comments. Certainly, if we had presumed consent, there wouldn't be such a heavy burden placed on the living to donate organs. I think prayerfully of the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex and her family. These are difficult decisions for living people to make that perhaps wouldn't have to be made if there was presumed consent.

I particularly listened to the member from Thornhill. He's absolutely right; that's what I said at the outset. It's like if Queen's Park were on fire, there would be Liberals off-site, not putting the fire out but drafting legislation about fire-retardant materials. That's what this government does best. It does photo ops; it does pieces of legislation that don't change very much but sound good. That's what we have here. It's a piece of legislation that doesn't change much. Show us an employer or an employee where this would be brought to bear. I mean, please. If they could, they would have already. We know that. Certainly, one of the main objections to presumed consent that I didn't hear here is this idea that doctors would be pulling the plug too early, which is absolutely ridiculous. If it were the case, they'd do that on organ donors already.

We have jurisdictional examples around the world. We have the more egregious example right here in Ontario: 1,700 people on the waiting list, 100 deaths a year—waiting for donors. Do something. Show leadership. Bring in presumed consent. Stand up for all of those who are taking up hospital beds, whose families are praying, as we sit here, that somebody, somewhere, will come forward with an organ that they can use to save their loved one's life. Show leadership. Save lives. Here's an opportunity. Don't just do this silly little bill that won't change anything. Do something. Do something, as the member from Thornhill said, that we can really debate. Thank you, and here are prayers for all of those waiting; they'll keep waiting.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to join this debate on a bill that, as other members have indicated during debate this morning, is perhaps, unfortunately, more of a diversion than it is an answer to a serious issue that we have in this province. I will be, of course, supporting the bill, because it is a small element of the bigger picture that this government unfortunately is refusing to address. It allows for 13 weeks of leave of absence without pay for employees who undergo surgery in order to donate organs to other persons.

When I first read the explanatory note of this bill, I must admit that I had great consternation, because I thought, how do we debate this bill in all seriousness? How do we spend debate time around a piece of legislation that on the one hand says, "Employees, we're going to give you the right to take 13 weeks off without incurring the penalty of losing your job," and how do we say to employers, "By the way, you have to keep that 13 weeks open for this employee who has the ability and the desire to save another life"?

0950

So we're calling on the employer to make a financial commitment because to give an employee 13 weeks off, that employee has to be replaced. We are saying to the employer, "We, as the government, see it as your responsibility to replace an employee who has taken it upon himself or herself to give the gift of life, and it's okay for you to take on that financial responsibility," but we're saying to the employee, "Without pay. Thank you very much for doing that and for your sacrifice."

Reference was made earlier to the supposed strategy for organ donation that reimburses some expenses for this person who is giving the gift of life, but that's all. There's no compensation or recognition beyond that, no recognition for the fact that when someone gives the gift of life, they are essentially taking that person and putting that person back into the mainstream of life, taking them perhaps from a hospital bed that is costing thousands of dollars a day, and this government is not prepared to recognize that contribution.

I find it an insult, quite frankly, that this government continues to bring forward legislation, and, as the member for Parkdale-High Park indicated before, is willing to

actually go out and do the photo ops and get the headlines and be perceived to be doing something. The way the articles are written and the way the media represents this, the perception across the province is that this government is actually serious about this issue of organ donation, when we know that they're not. We know that they're not, because repeatedly this government has had the opportunity to take serious steps forward, to put in place meaningful legislation, to put in place a plan, not just a strategy.

When we look at the code words that this government has used since its election in 2003, repeatedly the word "strategy" is there, but when you examine the strategy, there is no plan and there are no resources, and there is never any implementation. But they've had their headline, they've had their day in the Sun or the Star or the Globe. It seems that is really all that matters to this government—divert the attention and have the focus on the headline.

I support this legislation, but, as has been said before today, there are 1,700 people in this province at any given time waiting for an organ. One person dies every three days on that waiting list. So when we talk about a 1,700-person waiting list, it's only a fraction of the people who are in dire need of an organ to sustain their lives. To even talk about a 1,700-person waiting list does an injustice to the crisis that we really are experiencing in this province with people who desperately want only one thing, and that is to live. Every person in this province has it within them to give that gift of life, but we have no plan and we have no strategy with resources.

The Trillium Gift of Life Network is an organization that is doing its best, within the parameters and within the limitations that are given them by this government. I commend them for the good work that they do. What is sad is that they have to look at other jurisdictions and see what is actually happening, what others can do. The frustration they have is that they know what could be done, if only the government were to prioritize. And what the government, of course, will say is, "Here comes the opposition with another spend request." They will plead that they are without resources. They're facing an \$18-billion deficit in their budget, and so they will sidestep any request for serious focus on this issue by saying, "We don't have the resources. We don't have the money."

We're not asking for a spend. We're asking for priorities to be set right. We're asking for this government to get their priorities right when they sit at the cabinet table and determine how the funds, the taxpayers' dollars, are going to be allocated—how they are going to allocate that. We, in the official opposition, and I would say that probably the vast majority of members in this House in all parties, whether it be the third party or the Liberal Party—I believe that most members in this House fundamentally believe that we should be prioritizing health care. Our seniors and people who are most vulnerable in our society should be at the top of the pyramid when we set our priorities for spending. That should be the guiding principle when cabinet ministers get together. When the

Minister of Finance and the Premier determine what this next budget will look like, they should be looking at priorities, not working backwards and saying they're going to dump billions into a failing industry where we will never, ever see where that money is going.

Let's start at the top and say these are our priorities: health care and people who are dying. It's one thing to lose someone in an accident; it's another thing for government to allow people to languish in hospital beds, knowing that there is an answer, knowing that there is a gift of life that will save that life and put them back into the mainstream of life. It will give them a quality of life, reunite them with their family and allow them to be productive again in our society. To simply turn our backs on them—that is essentially what we are doing by refusing to put in place a framework for organ donation that we know will work. We are simply responding with pieces of legislation like we have before us today. That isn't even a building block. It's a chip off a block, which is important, but it solves no problems. It does not address the issue.

This House has had before it many private members' bills. My colleague the member for Welland has repeatedly brought legislation forward proposing presumed consent. I have had private members' bills before this House; the most recent was the Mandatory Declaration Act. My bill was broadly supported by this Legislature. It was supported by the Trillium Gift of Life. But the government refused to bring it forward for third reading. Instead, what the Minister of Health did was to refer the entire matter to a study. The study came forward with a number of recommendations and, interestingly enough, one of the recommendations was that there should be a mandatory declaration.

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Now, what that bill did not address was the issue of presumed consent, because frankly I do have concerns on that issue. I happen to believe that organ donation is a gift of life and that gift should be given graciously and voluntarily. It is a personal decision on the part of each and every person in this province. And because we still don't have the level of awareness and education about organ donation, I believe it is perhaps still premature for this House to make the move to presumed consent.

But what I do believe is that we should have a mandatory administrative requirement in this province that every individual citizen who applies for or renews a provincial health card or driver's licence is required to answer a question relating to organ donation, that every individual who is involved in that administrative process is confronted once every two or three years with the question, "Do you want to be an organ donor?" The bill provided for three answers: One is "yes," the second is "no" and the third is "undecided," because quite frankly, many people are not ready to make that decision. They either don't know enough about it or they're uncertain about it themselves, and so they should have the opportunity to say they're undecided. But what that would do is at least ensure that people are confronted with the

question and given an opportunity to become aware of the issue.

This government refused to implement that. When I had discussions with the Minister of Health at the time, he could give me no answer as to why a simple administrative measure like that could not be implemented and why the government wasn't prepared to move forward on it. We draw our own conclusions: Was it perhaps because the proposal came forward from a member of the opposition? There was no other reason. It's not a costly measure. It's common sense. There's broad public support for it.

I became interested and compelled to become involved in the issue of organ donation because of my experiences as a member of provincial Parliament. On a number of occasions, I've had constituents sit across from me, telling me they are waiting for an organ and that their lives are at a standstill. They're at different stages of health. I had one constituent come to me who had not been working for a number of years and was in a very weak state. He told me that he had been on the waiting list for a kidney for about five years and his health was failing rapidly.

The next time I saw this individual sit across from me at my desk in my constituency office, he was a new man. He looked 20 years younger. He told me that he had gone to Miami to have a new kidney. He was able to do that within three months after making application. It cost him a lot of money, but it didn't cost him nearly as much as his constant dialysis and medical treatment was costing the health care system.

So he came back to me and said, "Do you think the provincial government would be willing to reimburse me for the cost of having my transplant in Miami?" Of course the response from the government came: "No." Penny-wise, pound foolish. Had he not had the transplant, he would have continued to cost the system hundreds of thousands of dollars.

So when my colleague the member for Thornhill talks about the lack of a comprehensive plan, that's another aspect of it. If the organs are not available here, then should we not be willing to step into the gap and say that if we can't provide it here in the province of Ontario, but it is available elsewhere, we're willing to cover the cost of that transplant—restore a life, give a life? Think of my constituent Gerri Seeley, who today is healthy because someone stepped forward as a living donor and gave her life.

We are fully aware of what it means for someone to step forward and offer to be a living donor. What we, today, on this side of the House, do not understand is why this government continues to dabble on the edges on this very important issue, why they're not willing to come forward, put in place a comprehensive plan and resource it adequately to ensure that those 1,700 people who are on that waiting list, that one person who dies every three days because we don't have an adequate system of organ donation in this province—why we won't reach our hand out to those people and say: "We

recognize that this is a priority. We will prioritize not only the planning but also the resourcing, and we'll do the right thing."

I will vote for this legislation, but I want the government to know that no one is being fooled by this—no one. And while the minister will no doubt be applauded when this bill is finally passed, the minister will know that his government continues to fail people who need organ transplants in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the comments made by the member from Newmarket–Aurora.

I just want to say, first off, that we in the New Democratic Party are supporting this legislation. I mean, apple pie, motherhood; we support those, too. The problem is, as the member pointed out, this is not going to change anything. It's not going to answer anything for those 1,700 people waiting for an organ donation and the 100 people who die every year waiting for an organ donation. This isn't going to change their lives in any way, shape or form, and the member was quite right to point that out.

I just want to say, in terms of the member's own bill, mandatory reporting is a very good step in the right direction. We would certainly support that if it came forward. Even that would be a little bit more robust, a little bit healthier and a little bit more courageous than what the government has done. But ultimately what we need is what they already have in other jurisdictions around the world: We need presumed consent, because only that way will we have enough organs—medical personnel will tell you this; ask them—to be able to save all the lives that need saving. This has been shown over and over again in jurisdiction after jurisdiction. We are way behind in our response to this, and this won't get us any further ahead.

We're united here in that realization. I think even government has to admit that this isn't going to change the landscape much, if at all, in the organ donation crisis that we face right now in Ontario. So, again, all I can do is repeat the numbers: 1,700 people waiting, 100 people dying. There is blood on our hands. We need presumed consent, and we need it now.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: A very eloquent contribution to the debate by my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora, asking the questions that, in a very real way, should be on all of our minds here.

It's very clear that we in the official opposition will accept this as the thin edge of the wedge and vote for it because, as my colleague from Parkdale–High Park has said, it's apple pie and motherhood. The NDP will clearly vote for it, and obviously, as government legislation, we can expect our friends on the government benches to vote for it. But I am willing to bet—and I wish there was a way to determine if this were true—that if you took a

straw poll of everyone who sits in any seat for any party, including the government, in this Legislature, and you said on a private basis, "Tell me: Should there be more or is this tiny little piece of the puzzle enough?" the answer would be, "No. There has got to be something to a strategy that makes it robust, when you call something a strategy." You can't talk about a subject as serious as organ donation and the saving of lives, with 1,700 people sitting on a waiting list, without getting deeper than, "You can have up to 13 weeks off work and, by the way, at no pay." That is patently ridiculous.

I wonder what debate costs in this Legislature: thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars per hour for us to sit here, the clerical support and all the rest of it, and what are we constantly debating? Bills that answer one element of a question, whether that's the mandatory retirement age that I referred to earlier and the implications that have never been addressed, or whether you're talking about an element that contributes to Smoke-Free Ontario, like not smoking in a car with people under 16. You vote for all of them. They're correct, but they're only a single element of an overall problem that this government never wants to discuss.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

I'll return to the member for Newmarket–Aurora, who has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to thank the member for Parkdale–High Park and my colleague from Thornhill for their comments.

I will just leave this final appeal with the government: When this bill passes, I would ask them to focus on the words "without pay" that are inscribed in this legislation. I would ask them to give consideration to whether it is, in fact, not simply moral, in addition to making good economic sense, that they should go back to their strategy that, as it stands now, is prepared to reimburse expenses for living donors, and whether it does not make good sense to provide compensation, at the very minimum, up to the formula that we have in place for unemployment insurance; that people who come forward should be appropriately compensated; and that it is a responsibility of the provincial government because of the multimillions of dollars that this province would save by having individuals step forward, being enabled to do so. There are many people who are willing, but they can't. So we should, at the very least, be prepared to step into the gap and provide that kind of financial support. I leave the government with those thoughts. I thank you for the opportunity to speak to this important topic.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Fonseca has moved second reading of Bill 154. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): So ordered.

It being close to 10:15, this House is in recess until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm more than pleased to introduce you to Arbi Kevrkians, who is a guest today and in the Legislature for the first time and enjoying an opportunity to see how well we work together.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I would like all members to join me in welcoming four guests from Durham region this morning: Allison Kahnert, Susan Pollard, Jean Mayne and Melissa Annan. Welcome.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I would like to introduce, from Barrie today, Brandy Hayes.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I would like to introduce a good friend of mine and a great Canadian, Dorothy Davey, who is in the gallery. Many of the members would know her husband as well, Senator Keith Davey, who is also a great Canadian. Welcome, Dorothy.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to introduce the family of page Emily Wilson: her mother Susan Wilson, sister Elizabeth Wilson, uncle Jim Ruddy, and they're here today as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member for Oakville and page Alexander Glista, I would like to welcome his mother, Rochelle Defehr, his sister Victoria Glista and his father, who is here as well in the east members' gallery.

I would also like to welcome some former pages from the page program last fall. They are in the west members' gallery: Kevin, Elise, Helen, Willem, Adriane, Shaukat, Karlee and Meagan. Welcome back to Queen's Park.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just like to take this opportunity on behalf of all members to say thank you to the group of pages. Today is their last day. We wish each of you all the best in your future endeavours, and perhaps one day some of you will be joining us here in the Legislature. So on behalf of all members, thank you very much.

There being no further introductions, it is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Deputy Premier. The Premier has previously said that the upcoming budget will address the crisis in the auto industry. Deputy Premier, before you finalize the details of the budget, would you agree to an immediate three-month

PST holiday on the purchase of new cars priced up to \$40,000? Would you agree to that?

Hon. George Smitherman: While I do want to agree with the honourable member that we are all anticipating the presentation of the government's budget in this place on March 26, I'm very confident that at that time Ontarians will see that our government continues to be moving in a direction which will enhance our capacity to provide a good quality of life for people in the province of Ontario.

We won't be making tax policy on the floor of the Legislature today. But on the issue of the automotive sector, it's very gratifying to see the honourable member joining the ranks of those in this Legislature who are supportive of our automotive sector. That has been somewhat inconsistent on the honourable member's part over the last number of years, but we agree with him forthrightly that it is necessary to look for opportunities to enhance the automotive sector in Ontario. It's such a staple of the Ontario economy.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: This minister seems to be a little sensitive on the automotive side of things. Given the widespread support for this idea, I would have hoped for a firmer commitment from the minister.

Last January, my PC colleague the member for Haldimand-Norfolk started a petition and asked the Minister of Finance to look into a PST holiday. The Ontario Auto Dealers Association has given its full support, as have both Ford and Toyota, for a consumer incentive to stimulate new car sales.

Minister, it's a no-brainer. Why won't you support this initiative?

Hon. George Smitherman: It's always good to see the honourable member picking up on the newspaper clipping of the day and making policy as he goes. He suggests that it's a no-brainer; I won't comment further on that.

But I do think that the presentation of the budget is the appropriate place for the consideration of tax matters going forward. March 26 is the day when our government will bring that forward. Over the last five years we've worked hard to try and rebuild public services in the province of Ontario. The challenges that are of a global nature, but which are impacting Ontario at the moment, are top of mind in the presentation of such a budget. It's good to see that the honourable member is already anticipating that.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'll avoid comment on the first comments the minister made, other than to mention bus shelters.

This proposal has a proven success record. In 1980, a PST holiday on the sale of 1979 models resulted in a 17% increase in car sales. Quebec brought in a similar program in 2007 for hybrids. And President Obama's stimulus package also included tax incentives for car purchases.

This proposal puts financial assistance to the auto industry in the hands of consumers. Minister, will you commit to this tax holiday today and give car dealers and

consumers the assurance and tools they need to get through this crisis?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to say to the honourable member that we're very, very appreciative of the support from him and from his party around the needs of the automotive sector. Over the last five years, we've been able to have investment in the automotive sector, which we believe is a good platform going forward to ensure that automotive continues to be an important contribution and dynamic in the economy of the province of Ontario.

As I said a couple of times already, obviously I won't be making tax policy for the government today, but we're taking note of the honourable member's interest, and that of others on this subject. On March 26, we'll look forward to the finance minister's presentation in this very Legislature.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: In the absence of others, I will go to the Deputy Premier, I guess. My question is—*Interjections.*

Hon. James J. Bradley: We're going to have to send out a posse to find the Tories.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Those flights to Florida are going early.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Transportation. Perhaps you may want to be going there.

The member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question then going to the Deputy Premier. As the Deputy Premier knows full well, there are residents in our long-term-care homes who are asking your government to make them—our seniors—a priority in your 2009 budget. So far, MPPs of all stripes have received more than 35,000 postcards signed by the residents, their family, their friends and staff, urging your Premier to provide desperately needed funding. They have indicated that there has been a steady erosion in funding in services to support resident care, comfort and safety.

In recognition of the fact that today the residents in our long-term-care homes are older—average age 83 years—and have more complex needs, will your government immediately implement the already promised 2,500 extra personal support workers and 2,000—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Deputy?

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Hon. George Smitherman: I would have thought that some of those people might be interested in signing cards to the honourable member asking her and her party to repudiate their commitment to eliminate \$3 billion of health funding through the elimination of the health premium. I would think that if we want to live up to the honourable member's rhetoric, where she said there has been an erosion of funding, it's almost like she's projecting onto the long-term-care file the idea that she won the

last election. That wasn't the case, and as a result, we've continued to make investments in long-term care.

Funding for long-term care has increased by 50% since our government came to office. That's more than \$1 billion, and a \$300-million increase this year alone. It's not to suggest that there are not pressures in long-term care. That's why we continue to invest in it, even in difficult and challenging economic times, and that's why it's so unfortunate that the honourable member is part of a party that continues to promise a \$3-billion cut to health care.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: The Deputy Premier again is making statements that are not true. There will be no cut to health care. Also, I would remind him that it is the Ontario Long Term Care Association who is indicating that there is a need to correct the six-year erosion in funding for services that support resident care, comfort and safety.

Let's not play politics with this issue. There are 77,000 residents in this province who desperately need care. As the Deputy Premier knows, Ontario funds significantly less care for residents than Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba and New Brunswick, where they receive about 3.2 hours or more; we only provide less than three. Will you live up to your promise to provide three hours of care per day per resident?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member says we only provide less than three, but when she was in office in the same role, she eliminated the regulations that called for a minimum standard at all in our long-term-care homes. When we came to office, the number was 2.25, and we've invested \$1 billion since then in bringing that forward. We've raised resident hours of care; we've had a 33.6% increase in daily raw food allowance; we've increased personal allowance, the comfort allowance for residents, several times by at least 9%; and this year alone, we've invested an additional \$300 million in long-term care.

It's true that there will always be opportunities to enhance the quality of care for individuals in long-term care. That's why we've taken many steps and why we will continue to do so. But what is not fair is that that honourable member stands in this Legislature today and doesn't tell the long-term-care association what most of us know, which is that when she was in office, they eliminated all standards for long-term care.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: We're very proud of our track record. In fact, we were the government that built the 20,000 new long-term-care beds; we were the government that recognized that seniors deserve decent, safe housing; and we redeveloped 16,000 beds. We're still waiting for the 35,000 beds that you haven't developed. In fact, you have no plan of action and we currently have 25,000 people waiting on a list for long-term care. Many of them are languishing in hospitals—they're called alternative-level-care patients. They block emergency rooms and contribute to delays in surgery, and they don't

want to be there. They want to be either in their own homes, in supportive housing or in long-term care.

So I say to you: There are 25,000 people on a waiting list for long-term care. Will your government develop a plan to build more homes and beds, and will you—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to say to the honourable member that she's here with the long-term-care association today and has found her voice, but in the 2007 election, which wasn't that long ago, not one word of reference in their platform to increase staffing in long-term care—not a word. A history of cuts, the elimination of minimum standards—this is the honourable member's record with respect to long-term care. She says she wants a plan for new builds: 2,277 beds are being built this year, and we're moving forward in partnership with the sector, with OANHSS and OLTCA, on the redevelopment of 35,000 beds over the next 10 years. The honourable member said she was proud of her record. I suppose she's also proud to be part of a party that plans a further \$3-billion cut to health care.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. Late yesterday in Ottawa, Chrysler CEO Thomas LaSorda made a very disturbing presentation to a parliamentary committee. Chrysler is threatening to slash the jobs of 9,400 Ontario workers unless governments provide more than \$2.5 billion in loans and the CAW agrees to reduce labour costs by 25%. I want to be clear that during this time of crisis in the auto sector New Democrats support financial assistance to companies like Chrysler, but we do not believe that large, foreign-based corporations should dictate the terms for taxpayers' assistance. Will this government stand up to Chrysler and demand guarantees on jobs, investments and pensions before any money flows?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I appreciate the member's question and, as well, the words of support for the government's approach, which is, number one, acting in the public interest. There was a presentation yesterday where a representative of the company spoke in a fashion that represented the investors' interest, and I understand that. This has been a negotiation that has been under way for several months. As long as Chrysler proves itself to be a viable company, there is a deal to be had, if they are willing. We'll continue to work with Chrysler and continue to talk to them about the issues they've raised and, yes, we will continue to ensure that there are production guarantees and that there is a footprint there so that we can ensure that there are future jobs for Ontarians with Chrysler.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Here is what New Democrats say needs to be part of the deal with Chrysler if we're going to be forking over more taxpayers' money. We need an iron-clad guarantee that Chrysler will keep its

promise to invest \$1 billion in Brampton and several hundred million dollars in Windsor. We need an iron-clad guarantee that it will maintain one quarter—25%—of its North American production in Ontario. We need an iron-clad guarantee that it will honour all pension and benefit obligations to employees and their families. These are guarantees, Minister, that were absent the last time this government forked over hundreds of millions of dollars to the Big Three. Has this government finally learned its lesson from its past mistakes and will it ask for these guarantees this time?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I appreciate the member laying out some information and, yes, the government will continue to act in the public interest. We will continue to negotiate with Chrysler in a fashion that ensures that we have a footprint in Ontario so that we can have continued production and continued jobs. I say to the member as well that it has always been and always will be the government's position that when we enter into these agreements there are iron-clad understandings as to exactly what the companies need to do. They are understandings that are in the form of a contract and those are contracts that can and will be enforced.

We want to work with Chrysler right now. We want to enter into an agreement if, in fact, the company is viable. I appreciate the member's comments with respect to the position that the member thinks the government should take.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: There's something else this government needs to demand, not just from Chrysler but from all companies that receive taxpayers' money. With hundreds of thousands of workers and their families having trouble keeping a roof over their head and food on their table, senior corporate executives must be sharing in the pain and sacrifice. There must be a hard cap on executive pay and perks. Why won't this government demand such a cap as a condition of any further taxpayers' investment?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The leader of the third party is a little late to the parade. This has been one of the conditions that the government placed from day one, and the United States government has placed as well. In fact, there is an acknowledgment by Mr. LaSorda in his remarks that this is exactly what the company intends to do, which is to comply with those restrictions that are placed on executives. There needs to be equality of sacrifice. Obviously, they are asking for a loan that is a sacrifice on behalf of the taxpayers; there needs to be sacrifice on behalf of management. The CAW has already come to the table with very significant concessions, acknowledging there needs to be sacrifice on their behalf as well. To the member: I agree. There needs to be equality of sacrifice in order for there to be a future, and I would like to be confident that there will be a future.

1050

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the acting Premier: Across our province, parents are struggling to find child care.

Only 12% of Ontario families have access to licensed child care in this province. It's not a luxury; it's an economic imperative. It allows parents, especially mothers, to attend school, continue working or actively seek employment. Yet in London, Ottawa and Toronto, those three cities together, we have at least 23,000 eligible children on waiting lists. How can this government continue to let down so many children and parents?

Hon. George Smitherman: I think there is a necessity for agreement on how important child care is in the lives of families, most certainly. Our government has been very, very committed to the circumstances, especially for lower-income individuals and families with children. That's why the Ontario child benefit is featured so prominently in the work we've been doing to try to enhance the livelihoods of people.

I think it's important to note as well that that member is part of an organization, a party, that has a story where, in their legacy, they did cut child care subsidies. We have worked over the course of the last several years to open new spaces all across the province of Ontario, and with families under \$20,000 or so eligible for a full child care subsidy.

I would look forward to continuing to work on this matter with the honourable member, but I remind her as well that our government's commitment around the Ontario child benefit stands as one very strong example of the dedication that we have to the lowest-income families in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Deputy Premier should know very well that the Ontario child benefit is no replacement for real child care spaces in this province. The minister should take his response to Susanne, a mother from Toronto who is on 25 child care centre waiting lists. She's been waiting since 2007, when she was still only a couple of months pregnant. Now, with only a couple of months left in her maternity leave, she still does not have a child care space. She and her husband are being forced, the two of them, to each take time off work, something that is completely unaffordable to that family. What does this government say to Susanne and so many other working mothers and fathers who still can't access a program that is essential to our social and economic well-being?

Hon. George Smitherman: For the honourable member to say that income support for lowest-income families in Ontario is unimportant even in the context of providing for their needs around child care is, I think, challenging. I understand that there are circumstances where individuals are seeking these spaces, but for that member to raise a question about Toronto as an example, 4,276 additional spaces have been created through efforts that we have made in the province of Ontario, focused here in Toronto in particular. In the member's own community, Hamilton, and in Niagara the number was more than 2,000, evidence that there has been, alongside efforts like the Ontario child benefit, a strong desire to try to enhance the services that people need to be able to support their families.

I accept that there is room for more improvement here. I also acknowledge that there are some limitations on a resource which make balancing all of those things somewhat difficult, but we'll continue to charge ahead and do the best for working families.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Regardless of the numbers the Acting Premier is floating around, the reality is that only 12% of Ontario's children are in child care—12% in licensed, regulated child care in this province. It's a dismal failure.

A new report from the Ontario Association of Food Banks says that 500,000 more Ontarians will fall into poverty unless this government takes serious action in its upcoming budget. That includes investing at least \$300 million in new child care money now. Two weeks from today, when it announces its budget, will the McGuinty government make this investment, and if not, tell those parents and tell those children why not?

Hon. George Smitherman: As one who has observed matters around child care for quite a long time, I was one of those who was disappointed that the New Democrats at the time, in the federal Parliament, took down a party that was implementing a national child care plan. This was a piece of progress that many had awaited for decades and decades, and instead they pulled the political trigger, all so that they could elect one or two additional members of the Legislature. I think it's also—

Mr. Paul Miller: History, history, history.

Hon. George Smitherman: Well, the member doesn't like history, and I'm not surprised that the member for Hamilton doesn't like the history of his party, where they killed a national child care program in pursuit of their own political objectives.

But I think it's very, very important to acknowledge as well that we are implementing full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds in the province of Ontario. This is about enhancing their capacity, of course, to learn and will also free up more child care spaces for younger children. It's disappointing that the leader of the third party, when she had the chance to vote in favour of full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds, voted against it.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the minister responsible for seniors. Seniors across the province are not immune to the economic downturn. They've worked hard to put aside funds in a retirement account, and they're counting on that income to pay their day-to-day living expenses. Many of those retirement accounts are eroded. The income from those retirement accounts is considerably less than it has been. My question is this: Has the minister responsible for seniors advocated with the Minister of Finance to allow seniors in this province to have access to 100% of their locked-in retirement accounts, and if not, why not?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I can assure the honourable member that, the Seniors' Secretariat being part of my

portfolio, I am cognizant of the pressures of this economy on seniors in Ontario. I take every opportunity to convey to the Minister of Finance my concerns on issues such as elder abuse and the fiscal impact as well. The property tax initiative, of course, was a response to that very dilemma, and it was done by this government in advance of the current economic malaise that we are now dealing with.

Be assured, honourable member, that I will continue to advocate on their behalf to the best of my ability.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: My question was very specific. Seniors from across the province are asking for the right to their own money. This is money that seniors have put aside through their hard work for the day that we now have, and that is when they are in need. This is their money. Under current legislation, they cannot access their own retirement funds. It will take an act of this Legislature to open up those locked-in retirement accounts.

I'd like to know from the minister, has she specifically made the request of the minister to include that measure in the next budget, and if she hasn't, will she commit today that that will in fact be her request of the Minister of Finance on behalf of seniors across the province?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: As I assured the honourable member, I have conveyed, and continue to convey my concerns and those of seniors in Ontario to the Minister of Finance. As the honourable member knows, we took measures to allow seniors more access in the budget of 2007. Unfortunately, the honourable member chose to vote against it.

There are indeed a number of aspects of this particular dilemma that belong in the federal domain. I have not had an opportunity to speak to the Minister of Finance at the federal level; I leave that to my colleague in cabinet to do so. But I can only assure the House and the member that many of the initiatives that we have taken are assisting these seniors in these turbulent times. I would look for his support when we bring in a very, very excellent budget in a couple of weeks' time.

STELCO

Mr. Paul Miller: To the Acting Premier: Hundreds of workers slated to be laid off at Stelco are just months short of qualifying for their pensions. The heart of the problem is that there are hundreds of workers who are coming up a few months short and will be forced to rely on EI if a practical bridging solution is not found.

The difference between a pension payment and employment insurance is significant, with a typical Stelco pension averaging about \$2,600 a month; employment insurance pays a maximum of \$1,800 a month.

Will this minister get on the phone to US Steel/Stelco executives and management and demand that they bridge these workers so that they can begin collecting their pensions rather than relying on employment insurance?

1100

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Michael Bryant: From day one in working with the head of the Steelworkers' union, we have been endeavouring to try and broker a solution. Just as the member has said, there are circumstances where potential early retirement, or other alternatives to layoffs, are options that ought to be pursued.

The local management is not the issue here. We have been reaching out to head office in order to do this, working with the union. It's a circumstance where the company needs to recognize that this is a union that will come to the table and will, in fact, work with the company to come forth with solutions that, in some cases, will save the company money. We will continue to push for that to happen because I think it's in the best interest of those workers.

Mr. Paul Miller: There are a few more details of the situation and how I understand them. To begin collecting a pension, workers must have 30 years of credited service acquired through their years in the plant. At Lake Erie Works, about 50 workers fall just short by months. The number doubles when you add workers who have 30 years of service but are short on their pension credits because of layoffs or strike time.

At Hamilton Steel, where three quarters of the workforce have more than 25 years of service, there are about 300 people in this position. I repeat: Will the minister get on the phone to US Steel/Stelco management, whether it's Pittsburgh or whether it's here, and demand that they bridge these workers so that they can begin collecting pensions that they've worked a lifetime to earn and that they deserve?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Again, I just want to assure the member that that has been the approach of this government from day one, pursuing this solution through a variety of means and working with Leo Gerard, who I'm going to see again today. We want to bring the parties to the table in order to come up with a solution.

The member has aptly summed up the situation for a number of workers. We always need to be pursuing alternatives. It's troubling that this is the first time in 25 years that Leo Gerard has not been given the opportunity to come to the table and work out alternatives. But that doesn't mean that we can't still try and do it, and the government is going to do everything it can to make that happen.

TOURISM

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: My question is to the Minister of Tourism. Recently it was announced that the McGuinty government is providing funding to help the National Capital Commission and region host the 2009 Genie Awards and Genie week. I understand that the awards will take place on April 4 at the Canadian Aviation Museum in Ottawa.

There is no doubt that tourism helps local economies and creates jobs throughout the province. Can the minister outline why investments such as these from our government are important to communities throughout the region and throughout the entire province?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: On Tuesday, I had the opportunity to attend the Genie Award nominee reception here in Toronto, together with my colleague, the Honourable Jim Watson, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who's a huge proponent of Ottawa. I want to congratulate all of the nominees for our Genie Awards this year.

I was pleased to announce, on behalf of the McGuinty government, that we will be investing \$150,000 to help the National Capital Commission host the Genie Awards and Genie week. Absolutely.

It's support like this for high-profile events like the Genies that help to bring focus to a community and attract visitors to the area. Festivals and events like the Genies are a great way to invigorate local economies, and I'm particularly delighted to see that Ottawa will be hosting this year.

As you know, tourism is an important economic driver in our province with over \$22 billion in revenues from tourism in 2007, and over—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Again to the Minister of Tourism: I am pleased that the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television decided to hold the Genies in Ottawa this year. I may, however, be quite partial. From what I understand, this is the first year that the academy has hosted this event in the national capital, and I'm sure it will draw quite a bit of attention to the area. Can the minister comment specifically on the impact of this event for the region, and why it is important for the McGuinty government to work with the National Capital Commission on tourism initiatives in the area?

L'hon. Monique M. Smith: Merci au membre de Glengarry—Prescott—Russell pour sa question et pour son travail dans la région d'Ottawa. On apprécie bien son bon travail.

At the Genie Awards nominee reception, I met with Marie Lemay, who is the CEO for the National Capital Commission. They are working to organize a fabulous Genie week in Ottawa. They have events planned throughout the week, culminating with the big Genie event, the awards ceremony itself.

The commission is known throughout the province for hosting successful annual events like their grand Canada Day celebration, as well as Winterlude. We recently provided funding to the National Capital Commission for a spectacular new light show at this year's Winterlude. I hope many of the members of the House had the opportunity to participate in that.

Ottawa is a perfect place to be hosting the Genies, as its tourism is heavily based in culture, and we hope—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question today is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. On Feb-

ruary 26, this House passed a resolution calling for the government to adequately fund community-based literacy and basic skills programs due to rapid growth in enrolment. On Monday and Tuesday of this week, your ministry consultants informed the agencies that their funding increase for 2009-10 would be 0%—frozen now for over a decade in spite of demands put on the agencies by the tens of thousands of Ontarians who are losing their jobs each month. Thousands of these individuals require basic literacy in order to return to the workforce.

Minister, why are you turning your back on Ontarians who require the services of community-based literacy and basic skills programs?

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the honourable member's interest in literacy—certainly a very serious issue that our government takes seriously. We invest \$75 million a year to get individuals the literacy and basic skills services they need at almost 300 sites across the province, including colleges, school boards and community-based organizations. This year, we provided a special \$2.68 million in one-time funding to literacy and basic skills service providers to help them deal with some of the additional pressures. We continue to work with the sector to assess their needs and make sure that we can offer the literacy services that are needed across this province.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you, Minister, but clearly you did not answer the question. We are talking about the funding of community-based literacy and basic skills programs. You continue to ignore them. You even denied a chance to meet with them. By April 1, these literacy groups will be laying off staff and releasing thousands of learners from their programs.

Minister, can you explain to the House and the people of Ontario why your government seems to find money for things like Liberal-friendly cricket clubs, cost overruns by tens of millions at dysfunctional casino expansions and handing out European sports cars as prizes for gambling, yet there doesn't seem to be any money to help Ontarians with literacy problems at a time when the community-based agencies desperately need and are pleading for your leadership on this file?

Hon. John Milloy: I've been very happy to meet with literacy groups and organizations, and I recognize their importance to our economy, especially in times of an economic downturn.

As I said to the honourable member, this year alone we are providing \$75 million for literacy and basic skills. We made an allowance of \$2.68 million for special one-time funding to deal with pressures, and we're going to continue to work with the sector.

I'd also point out to the honourable member that our Second Career program, to which the most recent statistics show over 7,000 people have come forward, has a literacy and basic skills component, as does our rapid re-employment and training service.

We recognize the importance of literacy on this side of the House, and we're going to continue to work with the sector.

DISCIPLINARY HEARING

Mr. Peter Kormos: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services: How much more public money will OPP Commissioner Julian Fantino be allowed to burn through in his pathetic attempt to oust the adjudicator at his embarrassing disciplinary hearing?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Obviously it's a matter that's before the courts, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment. The member knows full well that that is the case.

Mr. Peter Kormos: You see, it's the taxpayers who are picking up the tab. Commissioner Fantino has three law firms on retainer, all being paid exorbitant fees by the taxpayers of Ontario. Why doesn't this minister just tell Fantino to get on with finishing his cross-examination so that we can be spared further mockery of the justice system on the public's dime?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Let me reinforce and repeat what I said: It would be very inappropriate for me to interject myself in those proceedings. That's not right; that is inappropriate. I don't plan on doing anything that's inappropriate or not right.

1110

FLOODING

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, as we move into the spring after an unusually wet and snowy winter, many communities across the province are concerned about flooding. As the accumulated snow and ice continues to melt, it's not uncommon for many areas to experience risks. Last spring, we saw a few declarations of emergency due to flooding in communities throughout the province. Clearly, flooding has the potential to have devastating effects, including property damage and public safety concerns, particularly if people aren't adequately warned.

Would the minister outline for the House what steps our government is taking to prepare and adequately warn communities that are at risk of flooding?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Thank you very much for the question. The spring is coming and the floods are inevitable, so the challenge becomes how we manage it. It's an opportunity for us to share, through the Ministry of Natural Resources, what we are doing.

We have over 4,000 sensors at 1,200 stations across the province. They provide us the information. The water control structure has managed to minimize the impact of the flooding, but remember that at this time of year people forget that the flooding that may occur in the north hasn't hit us yet. It will hit us and can be significantly damaging to personal property and personal safety.

What we want to say to you, all of you—and we've sent a letter to every member, every municipality—is that safety is paramount; ensure that children stay away from running water; and, secondly, to access that information instantly on our website as to the different levels of flooding that are occurring in southern Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Minister, I understand that the Ministry of Natural Resources is responsible for flood forecasting and that flood advisories are then communicated to municipalities and local conservation authorities, which have plans in place to deal with such situations. However, I think we remain concerned about unorganized areas where there isn't a municipality or conservation area in place to deal with floods. This includes rural areas in southern Ontario, as well as First Nations communities in the north, such as the James Bay First Nations communities, which often experience flood emergencies in the spring.

Would the minister clarify for the House what plans are in place to aid these areas in case of flooding?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Again, it gives us an opportunity to share with the House and with the general public what we do. In the far north and in the unorganized territories, we work very closely with emergency management. There are five major rivers that flood into Hudson Bay and James Bay, and flooding does occur. We do daily flyovers and often we take our First Nations with us so that we can have, from the air, an on-the-ground look at what is happening so that we're able to work with, in particular, emergency management, when and if there is flooding.

Again, I can't emphasize how important this is. Just because spring comes here, don't forget it's further in the north in times of thaw, and that thaw ultimately may flow down through our major river systems, so safety is paramount.

You have an opportunity to get the message out to your community. Have them use our website and our conservation authorities that work very closely with us, in order to get accurate, up-to-date information that we can—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question?

TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Minister, in 2008, Premier McGuinty sent greetings to an organization, Staffing for Canada Week, where he said, "I applaud the staffing industry and temporary and contractual employees for their invaluable contribution to the continuing prosperity of our province and country as a whole."

We on this side of the House have some concerns with parts of Bill 139, which, if passed, will kill the temporary staffing industry, which employs, as you well know, over 200,000 people and is a very vital part of Ontario's economic recovery.

Minister, given your Premier's warm sentiments toward this industry and the importance that this industry plays in our economy, why are you and your party trying to kill this industry with Bill 139?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for the question. I also want to thank the member for the

supportive comments he has made on this legislation, where he said, "In general, we are supportive of the government's efforts to offer protection to workers in temporary agencies." We agree with the member.

The member wasn't here at the time that his party was governing this province, but I can tell him that the approach they took was one of weakening labour legislation, weakening employment standards legislation. We don't agree with that. What we have brought is a fair and balanced approach to address vulnerable workers in this province, some of our lowest-income workers. We want to ensure that they have the same rights as other employees in Ontario. I think this is something the member knows in his heart of hearts he should agree with. We want to ensure that those employees have opportunity.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to thank the minister for the history lesson, but we're talking about the here and now. Yesterday I met with ACSESS, the Association of Canadian Search, Employment and Staffing Services, who told me quite clearly that they would support this bill if you would agree to make two amendments that would not change the intent of your bill but would allow this industry that employs 200,000 Ontarians to continue to prosper. I know your own members are going to hear from these industries as well. If you don't support these technical amendments, the industry will die and will not be in a position to help meet Ontario companies' staffing needs when this economy does pick up. In effect, you will hamstring the economic potential.

Minister, will you commit to amending Bill 139 and listen to the stakeholders that you failed to consult with when you brought this bill forward?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I say to the member is that we highly respect the legislative process. I've had the opportunity—actually, I think the member is speaking to a number of stakeholders in particular, but ACSESS would be one of them. I would say that in my time as Minister of Labour, in the five months, I have spent more time with that stakeholder, ACSESS, and we're happy to do so and listen to their concerns that they bring to the table. Also, this is going to committee. There will be more opportunity to bring forward deputations, but what we are doing is changing some unfair practices that we feel are out there right now in the temporary help agencies sector: charging upfront fees to these workers and charging a temp-to-perm fee, where a lot of them feel that they can't find that permanent employment.

Also, what this legislation will do is give those workers the information—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Acting Premier. A Toronto Star article on March 4 stated that "data analysis ... found that 11,000 worker injuries were downplayed or improperly handled over a seven-year period, including 3,000 amputations, fractures, dislocations, bad

burns and other injuries, that companies" did not report one day of lost work. It further stated that "at the time, WSIB chair Steve Mahoney said the Star's findings proved exceptional behaviour, not the rule."

It is clear from the Morneau Sobeco report that this behaviour is not and was not the exception for a number of years. What immediate action is the government taking to get this situation corrected?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for the question. I also want to thank Morneau Sobeco for their report and review of the experience rating system, which is what it is called, and the Toronto Star's David Bruser for his in-depth report on this very important file. What it is about is that we want to incent employers on good behaviour when it comes to health and safety in the workplace.

That is why this government for the second time is doing a value-for-money audit of that program. We want to ensure that we get it right. After many, many years of that program, where it was not addressed—I could tell you that under the Conservative government they took a laissez-faire approach to this program. They took it out of the WSIB and we have had to manage this program—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: The chair of the WSIB responded to the Toronto Star article, stating that he has been saying that "sound, rational changes" are needed and have been needed for some time. This is the same WSIB chair who last year denied that the Ontario Federation of Labour has been raising the flawed experience rating system with him for some time.

It is clear that no action was taken before the NDP, with the support of the Ontario Federation of Labour, supported them and raised this extremely serious issue during an opposition day motion last year. When will this government finally admit that the WSIB has been in serious trouble for some time and replace the chair with someone who gets it?

1120

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I am glad that the chair took leadership on this file and is addressing this file. That's why the Morneau Sobeco report was asked for. The recommendations out of that report are being taken to the stakeholders by the chair of the WSIB. It is being discussed with the board. They're working with injured workers; they're working with employers; they're working with trade unions. They want to ensure that they get it right.

I can tell you that when I go out there and speak with all these various stakeholders, one thing they all tell me is that we do need a program to incent good and great behaviour when it comes to health and safety in the workplace. That's why we have taken such a keen interest in this: to get it right, because this is about lowering injury rates in the workplace, and we've done an excellent job on—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Bob Delaney: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Public transit gets people in western Mississauga from where they live to where they work, study or go for entertainment. GO trains are our daily lifelines, and I'm one of those commuters. I generally take the train from either the Streetsville or Lisgar stations. GO Transit users help ease congestion on our roads. GO trains help us arrive on time; for many, with the advantages of a commuter catnap.

There are three GO train stops on the Milton line serving our western Mississauga neighbourhoods of Lisgar, Meadowvale and Streetsville. Milton is the third-busiest line on the GO network, with about 27,000 daily riders. GO Transit has worked very hard with our communities to build a new station and improve our existing facilities, but we need more. Will the Minister of Transportation—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member from Mississauga—Streetsville will be pleased to hear, as all members will, that GO Transit will soon be adding two new weekly trains on the Milton line. This new rail service on the Milton line is in part due to the \$2.5 billion that this government has invested in GO Transit since 2003.

The first train will be added to the morning schedule and will arrive at Union just after 9 a.m. It will give customers the benefit of a slightly later morning arrival. The second train will be added to the evening schedule, departing Union Station shortly after 5:30 p.m. This will allow for even more options to choose from, making it easier for commuters to get home to their families even faster.

To help encourage GO ridership, on average, GO Transit subsidizes almost 65,000 people per month in Mississauga alone to take Mississauga Transit to the GO station. Most of these initiatives are helping—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Bob Delaney: More than 4,000 commuters in neighbourhoods like Streetsville, Meadowvale, Lisgar, Churchill Meadows and central Erin Mills, which I represent and the member for Mississauga—Erindale represents, are pleased to hear that the Milton line will soon benefit from this much-needed increase in service. For more than a dozen years between 1990 and 2003, public transit on the Milton GO line was simply lost in the 1980s. Put simply, nothing happened.

The system still needs better integration and needs more places more often on the line, especially Pearson airport. While GO trains are a great way to get downtown quickly for consumers, there are other public transit options open to us in Mississauga. In Peel region, we need to move north-south and east-west without taking a car and get where we're going quickly and conveniently. Will the Minister of Transportation share with the House—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member for Mississauga—Streetsville is an advocate for public transit. Everyone can see that. We appreciate all the work he has done on this front.

Since 2003, this government has invested almost \$200 million in public transit in the city of Mississauga. Most recently, it was announced that Mississauga received \$15.8 million in gas tax funding, which can be used for introducing service improvements such as additional buses, expanded routes and improved security infrastructure.

Metrolinx, which plans for transit across the GTA and Hamilton, has recently released their regional transportation plan for Mississauga. It envisions rapid transit along Hurontario Street from Highway 407 to Port Credit GO station and along Dundas Street West from Kipling Avenue to Brant Street, and electrification of the Lakeshore GO rail line. We're already moving forward. One of Metrolinx's—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

STELCO

Mr. Toby Barrett: A question to the acting Premier: 1,200 steelworkers from Lake Erie Steel attended a meeting this past Monday in my riding to hear the latest on the idling of our area's largest employer, US Steel. These jobs are now on hold indefinitely. As well, 1,200 steelworkers met in Hamilton this week. As the Simcoe Reformer reports, these people walked out of that meeting filled with doubt, uncertainty and anger.

Acting Premier, do you plan on abandoning these steelworkers, just as you abandoned the 300,000 people in the manufacturing sector who lost their jobs before them?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Well, really, what a bunch of—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Baloney.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Yes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Michael Bryant: This to a government that in fact, as a result of investments made in 2006 for US Steel workers, then Stelco workers, literally saved those workers' pensions. This was a company that was in receivership, and literally, the government stepped in to save the pensions.

But to the other part of the member's question, we do want to work with both the company and the workers. We want to try to broker a solution, as I said before, because that's in the best interests of the workers. This is a circumstance where the company needs to come to the table, needs to work with the workers in order to see what alternatives there may be.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'm sure idled steelworkers phoning my office will take cold comfort in your opening comment there: the government that has taxed and spent its way onto the dole itself. Perhaps you have the wherewithal to have an answer in the coming budget.

You've found out that your emperor has no clothes. Three quarters of people in Ontario realize this government has no plan. Steelworkers need an industrial plan; they need a strategy; they need action for primary industry.

You saw this meltdown coming, and instead of setting aside \$27 billion, the extra revenue, for these tough times, you spent it. Please explain to these steelworkers in my riding why you have mismanaged Ontario's spending so badly that you now have nothing left to help when they need it most.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Unlike the other members who are representing these workers, who are not playing politics with this issue and are trying to come forward with a pragmatic solution, this member chooses to play politics.

But I want to assure those steelworkers in his riding that nonetheless, this government is going to continue to try to broker a solution between workers and management, because that is the right thing to do. The very least that the management can do is come to the table and talk about solutions with people who know how to come up with solutions, and in some cases save money for the company, but most important of all, create a future for those workers and for those communities, too.

TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the acting Premier. With jobs harder to come by, times are tougher for everyone, especially for everyday families. The Premier has suggested that he may harmonize the PST with the GST, immediately raising the price on basic goods. For a mom going shopping with her kids on a Saturday afternoon, Atlantic-style harmonization would mean paying 13% more for diapers, children's clothing, footwear, the corner hot dog treat and women's hygiene products.

Why would the McGuinty government increase prices on necessities when families are just struggling to get by?

Hon. George Smitherman: I would have to say that the member's question was about a minute of uninformed speculation.

Associated with the economic challenges that Ontario is facing, we're working diligently as a government to bring forward for presentation in this House on March 26 a budget which will allow us to move Ontario forward. We know that there is a lot of work to be done on that point. I just want to say to the honourable member that we should all look forward to the opportunity on that day in this House to hear the presentation of the budget from the government of Ontario, but I'm not in a position to be

involved in the speculation that is the honourable member's fancy today.

Mr. Michael Prue: It is the Premier's musings that caused the questions and the people out there to be concerned. The PST exemption was created for a reason: because these goods are considered to be the basics. Families aren't going to be able to avoid paying the tax. The Acting Premier—and the Premier—has a chance here to tell Ontarians that his government isn't going to raise taxes on necessities like diapers, children's clothing and shoes. Why won't the Acting Premier commit today to ensuring that any tax harmonization plan maintains the current PST exemptions? Tell people so they won't have to wait around and they don't have to be worried until March 26.

Hon. George Smitherman: I just wouldn't want to deprive the honourable member of his opportunity for these kinds of points of speculation. I think, though, that in his use of the word "necessity" and the demonstration of those items he referenced, there is obviously something that many of us would agree with. I think that there is, in the presentation from the honourable member, some information that the Minister of Finance might want to take a look at in the context of the presentation of his budget.

I could just remind members that we're going to stick with the tradition commonly held in our province of presenting a budget here in the Legislature on March 26. We're going to have that done, as is the tradition, by the Minister of Finance.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. Minister, the Robarts Research Institute was officially merged with the University of Western Ontario on July 1, 2007, with the help of funding from our government. These two world-class research institutes are conducting groundbreaking research in the field of biotechnology and the medical devices field. This accomplishment is a source of pride in London. We're proud of the University of Western Ontario and the Robarts Research Institute because they're doing a great job for our community and for the province of Ontario. Minister, my question to you is, what are you doing through your ministry and our government to support those world-class institutes to serve our community, our province and our nation?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my friend for the question and his advocacy, and the other members of the London region, who are so very, very proud of the University of Western Ontario and the Robarts Research Institute.

I want to share with the House that we made an investment of some \$12 million to bring the two institutions, UWO and Robarts, together through an investment made by my ministry. Robarts is installing two new brain scanners—something the opposition may want to hear about—which will provide insights into learning percep-

tion and communication for the diagnosis and treatment of such things as psychiatric disease, dementia, depression and Alzheimer's. I know the opposition wanted to hear about that.

The capital funding is a tremendous investment in the world-class research of such scientists as Dr. Ravi Menon, Mel Goodale and Aaron Fenster from the brain and mind centre. We're particularly proud of the new 7-Tesla MRI—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Recently, a report was released in the province of Ontario talking about the importance of innovation and research in order to carry this province toward a brighter future. What are you doing, Minister, to ensure support for research and innovation in this province to make sure we are part of the movement toward a brighter future for the province of Ontario and this nation?

Hon. John Wilkinson: What we understand on this side of the House is that we need to attract top talent and give them the very best tools. At the Robarts institute we have acquired through our investment what is known as a 7-Tesla MRI machine, the most powerful MRI in this country and one of only three in the world. It is amazing that we've been able to make that investment because we believe in the amazing talent of Mel Goodale, Aaron Fenster and Ravi Menon and all the other researchers in the group.

Biotechnology and life sciences are an area where this province leads, and though there may be others around the House who don't understand that, I think the people understand. Because of the advocacy of members like the member from London—Fanshawe and the other members of our London caucus, how strong they are, we're so very—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

The time for question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I rise in the House today to recognize the region of Peel on becoming the first winner of a Public Sector Leadership Award from the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, earning gold in the municipal category. The leadership awards recognize public sector organizations that have demonstrated outstanding leadership by taking bold steps through advancements in public policy and management. Specifically, the award profiles individuals and/or teams who have dared to take their organization in a new direction. The region of Peel's Common Purpose Transition Program aims to achieve three outcomes: employee engagement, client satisfaction and trust in the services that they deliver. The program involved a complete change in service delivery, from a corporate perspective, shifting to a customer point of view.

Countries from around the world often come to Canada to learn how to emulate the innovation and success of public sector organizations like the region of Peel. Successful leadership is about taking a calculated risk. As Robert Kennedy once said famously, "Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly."

Congratulations to the region of Peel for being innovative and for having the courage to dare to take the organization to the next level. The region of Peel has long been a leader in public sector management in Canada. This award just confirms and recognizes their hard work.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm looking around for our guest, but he's not here yet. I want to acknowledge nonetheless that Stu Auty, of the Canadian Safe School Network, is going to be joining us.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I guess my guests haven't arrived yet, but I want to mention their names: Youssef Mertti, and one other person whose name I don't remember very well.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I know this individual hasn't arrived yet, but John Sheehan from Peterborough will be here this afternoon. He just left Mr. Brownell's office. He's been very involved in the preservation of heritage in Peterborough for many, many years and will be here this afternoon to view the debate on Bill 149, An Act to protect Ontario's inactive cemeteries, in this House later this afternoon.

Mr. Dave Levac: I would like to introduce my mother.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise today to comment on community-based literacy and basic skills programs. I want to say right off the bat that it's my understanding, dealing with the stakeholders I've been working with across the province of Ontario, that these organizations are severely underfunded, and it is with great regret that the minister stood in the House today and tried to defend the action of the McGuinty Liberals.

We thought that the resolution we passed in the House back on February 26 was supported by all the members and voted on. It was that they supported the fact that it would need additional and adequate funding to continue on into the future.

That being said, these organizations have seen substantial increases in the number of clients coming to the door who are called learners. With 300,000 or 400,000 people out of work today in the manufacturing sector, more than ever we need people who can teach community-based skills, reading and writing etc. What's happened now with the fact that the minister has frozen funding for the last 10 years, even with these community-based programs, we're going to see layoffs.

I can tell you that that's a sad day for the province of Ontario. These are programs that work in Ontario. I would urge all members of this House, as the budget approaches, to call their MPPs, call the Minister of Finance—and please ask him to increase the funding in these particular areas: community-based literacy and basic skills funding.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Mr. Jeff Leal: I had the distinct pleasure of welcoming the Honourable Donna Cansfield, Minister of Natural Resources, to my riding of Peterborough on Friday, March 6.

Minister Cansfield contacted me after receiving letters from grade 4 students attending St. Catherine Elementary School. They wrote about the Endangered Species Act, a topic of great importance to them. Their letters revealed a comprehension beyond their years, and a passion to preserve our natural resources and protect our endangered species. These young people will grow to be great stewards of this province.

During her visit to St. Catherine school, she spoke to the general assembly about species at risk and environmental conservation. The minister spoke about the importance of preserving wildlife and their habitat. She talked about the steps that Ontario is taking to do this through the creation of the Species at Risk Act.

During the question period that followed, a student asked, "What species are at greatest risk in the province of Ontario?" Clearly, these children recognize the value of protecting our wildlife for the future—their future.

After the general assembly, the minister visited Mr. Pat Mackey's grade 4 class and met the students who had written to her. I'd like to end by reading a poem written by one of these students:

God's Gifts cannot go amiss,
especially those that are at risk.
We all must help and show we care.
to lose a special animal is not fair.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Imagine being a senior who is struggling to make ends meet and being told by the government that even though you have money, you can't use it. Imagine needing to repair your house or buy a new car and being told by the government that you can't spend your own money to do it.

That's the situation that many seniors across the province are facing. They are owners of life income funds or locked-in retirement income funds. Both of these types of accounts severely restrict the amount of money that can be withdrawn. In fact, to access the account for severe financial hardship, you have to apply and actually pay an application fee to try to get access to your own money.

Unlocking these pensions is a simple step the government can take to give people the flexibility they need

to manage their own finances. Other provinces already allow significantly more flexibility in when people can withdraw money from these funds. Saskatchewan allows 100% to be withdrawn any time after the age of 55.

Like these other provinces, Ontario should recognize the importance of giving people access to their own money, and allow seniors to withdraw 100% of their life income funds or locked-in retirement income funds. These people worked hard to save for old age. Now that it has arrived, they should be entitled to access these savings.

This change wouldn't cost the government anything. In fact, people who are finally making much-needed purchases will help the economy.

In the budget on March 26, the McGuinty government has an opportunity to do the right thing and ensure that people who worked hard for their money have access to it when they need it.

INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL

Mr. Kim Craiton: February was indeed a truly great month for the people of my riding of Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Fort Erie. Together with my colleague the federal Minister of Justice, the Honourable Rob Nicholson, we announced support for three major infrastructure projects totalling \$19 million in our riding.

In Niagara Falls, an investment of \$10 million in the Lundy's Lane Historical Museum as an 1812-14 bi-centennial legacy gift will make the museum a serious battlefield tourist attraction. It will attract history buffs for generations to come.

In Niagara-on-the-Lake, a \$6-million investment, in addition to the \$1.5 million by our province, will allow the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake to finally complete their proposed first-class community centre, an event I look forward to.

In Fort Erie, for the longest time, the residents of Crescent Park North have had to put up with flooding and unsanitary conditions. I'm happy to report that our \$3-million investment there will provide the citizens of that part of Fort Erie some comfort from the worry of sewer backups in their basements.

The \$19-million infrastructure investment in Niagara will stimulate the economy. It will create jobs. It will support a cleaner environment and enhance the overall lifestyle of the people of my riding. For this, the leadership of my government needs to be commended.

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JUVENILE ARTHRITIS AWARENESS MONTH

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I rise today to speak to the fact that March is Juvenile Arthritis AwarenessMonth.

Many Ontarians may not be aware that children do suffer from and get arthritis. In order to increase the public's knowledge of this disease, this is the month when the Arthritis Society recognizes it.

Juvenile arthritis can cause excruciating, constant pain, fatigue, depression and disability that can sideline children from engaging in normal activities such as their schoolwork and physical activity. Sometimes children are ridiculed by their peers for having an old person's disease and are isolated because they can't keep up with the other children.

During this month, activities and outreach are being undertaken, and the funds raised by the Arthritis Society help to provide education and support programs and services to the families of children with arthritis. It also supports research into the underlying causes of juvenile arthritis.

Yes, juvenile arthritis can take a terrible toll on the lives of our children and youth, as well as their families and friends. I commend the Arthritis Society for making the difference, and I wish them all the best in their quest to eliminate juvenile arthritis.

UNPARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE

Mr. Peter Kormos: Speaker, I'm concerned about the language being used in this chamber and I'm calling upon you to intervene.

Look, I have no qualms about neologisms, and a malapropism, although always regrettable, at least can generate some humour. But I'll tell you, what's driving me freaking nuts is the misuse—the all-too-frequent misuse—of the word “fulsome.”

Oxford Guide to English Usage: “fulsome is a pejorative term, applied to nouns such as flattery, praise, servility, affection etc., and means ‘cloying, excessive, disgusting by excess.’”

Fowler's Modern English Usage refers to the 1663 definition of “fulsome”: “Its standard current meaning (of language, style, behaviour etc.) offensive to good taste by being excessively flattering,” and it goes on, “Meanwhile, everyone is advised to restrict the word to its 1663 meaning.” I didn't say that; Fowler's did.

It is incredible that this word is being bandied about. People want to say “full,” not “fuller.” There's no such thing as “fuller,” because something is either full or it's not. Nothing can be fuller. People want to say “more full.” Nothing can be more full. What's even worse than “fulsome” is “more fulsome.”

Speaker, it's a wonderful word with beautiful nuance. It's a historical English word. Use your prerogative. Surely if “baloney” is unparliamentary language, the misuse and the bastardization and diminishment of “fulsome” is equally unparliamentary.

JUVENILE ARTHRITIS AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. David Zimmer: I have a fulsome statement dealing with Juvenile Arthritis Awareness Month.

Mr. Peter Kormos: No, you don't. Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: I'm convinced he doesn't have a fulsome statement; he has a full one that is going to last one

minute and 30 seconds, and I propose that he get that one minute and 30 seconds to make his full statement.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The honourable member will have a full statement. Please reset the clock to a minute and 30 seconds.

Mr. David Zimmer: My complete statement is as follows: I too want to speak to March as Juvenile Arthritis Awareness Month.

Many Ontarians are not aware that children can get arthritis. To increase the public's knowledge of this disease, the Arthritis Society has designated March as Juvenile Arthritis Awareness Month.

Juvenile arthritis is one of the most common chronic conditions that affect children. About one in 1,000 children under the age of 16 lives with arthritis. Juvenile arthritis and arthritis in its many forms causes excruciating, constant pain, fatigue, depression and disability that can sideline a child from engaging in the normal school activities: school work, school play and physical activities. Sadly, many children with arthritis are teased and ridiculed by their peers in school for having “an old people's disease” and are isolated because they are unable to keep up with their peers.

During the month of March, activities and outreach are being undertaken across the province of Ontario. Funds raised by the Arthritis Society help to provide education and community support programs and services to families of children with arthritis and support research into the underlying cause of juvenile arthritis.

Juvenile arthritis can take a terrible toll on the lives of Canadian children, as well as their families and friends. I commend the Arthritis Society for this initiative.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Dave Levac: I rise in the House today to share the McGuinty government's continued efforts to improve higher education in Ontario.

While this government and, more importantly, the people of Ontario recognize the current economic difficulties facing countries around the world are very, very real, we also know that giving our students, as part of our five-point plan, proper skills and training to ensure success in the 21st century knowledge-based economy is of the utmost importance.

That's why the McGuinty government has invested \$6.2 billion in post-secondary education as part of our Reaching Higher plan. This is the largest investment in higher education in over 40 years. As a result of this bold investment, we have 100,000 more students attending colleges and universities; we have doubled student aid; and we now provide grants, which were previously cancelled, to 168,000 deserving students every year.

We are also increasing graduate spaces to 15,000 and first-year enrolment in Ontario's medical schools by 23%; raised base operating grants to colleges and universities to \$4.2 billion, an increase of 56% since 2003; and committed \$2 billion to our skills-to-jobs action plan,

which includes \$560 million to support new skills for new careers.

These investments are symbolic—not only symbolic, but practical and actual—of the McGuinty government's commitment to students. While there's more to be done, and we will push that more be done, this government will continue to work to ensure that students have the tools to succeed in this new economy.

And, Mr. Speaker, I do want to remind the members of this House that there is a song called the Folsom Prison Blues.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT (KEEPING OUR KIDS SAFE AT SCHOOL), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION (SÉCURITÉ DE NOS ENFANTS À L'ÉCOLE)

Ms. Wynne moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 157, An Act to amend the Education Act / Projet de loi 157, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The minister for a short statement?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'll reserve my statement to ministerial statements.

MOTIONS

LEGISLATIVE MACE

Hon. Brad Duguid: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding a special mace ceremony.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I move that at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, March 24, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall deem the debate then taking place to be adjourned; and

The Speaker shall then adjourn the House during pleasure, for the purpose of permitting a ceremony on the floor of the chamber for the presentation of the refurbished mace; and

Following the ceremony, a representative of each recognized party may speak for up to five minutes to commemorate the event; and

That at the conclusion of these remarks, the Speaker shall adjourn the House until 10:30 a.m.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

STUDENT SAFETY SÉCURITÉ DES ÉLÈVES

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Before I begin, I just want to recognize the people who have worked on this legislation: Liz Harding and her team, who have joined us from the Ministry of Education—I thank them very much for their work; and Marika Bishop and Rob Coombs from my office, who have been very instrumental. I will acknowledge my parliamentary assistant, Liz Sandals, shortly, because she has led the development of this legislation.

Even one incident of bullying or harassment in our schools is unacceptable. Each one is one too many. We know these incidents can have a lasting impact on the well-being of the people involved and on their families. Safe schools have been a government priority from the beginning, when we introduced our safe schools strategy, and we will continue to take action to make our schools safer.

We've done a lot, but we're very aware that there is more to do, which is why, last February, I asked the safe schools action team to address some very sensitive and very serious issues: gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour among students. The safe schools action team also looked at barriers students face to reporting these issues and reporting requirements for support staff, and they participated in a review of local police-school board protocols.

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I want to very sincerely thank my colleague Liz Sandals, the member for Guelph, who is my parliamentary assistant, for so ably chairing that team in this process and the previous process. Thank you very much for all of your work.

Ses conclusions font réfléchir, mais l'équipe a formulé de nombreuses recommandations fortes qui peuvent nous aider à rendre nos écoles plus sûres. Nous avons annoncé que nous leur donnerions rapidement suite, et c'est le cas.

We are introducing the "keeping our kids safe at school" act, which, if passed, would require school staff to report to the principal any serious student incidents for which suspension or expulsion must be considered. The Education Act already lays out when suspension or expulsion must be considered by the principal, such as for incidents of bullying or assault. This legislation I'm introducing today would require school staff to report these activities to the principal so that the principal can respond appropriately. Principals cannot act on these behaviours if they do not know that they are happening.

We know that school staff in Ontario are committed to student safety. This legislation would help clarify the role of all school staff in reporting serious incidents. Under the existing legislation, there are clear requirements for principals on considering suspension or expulsion if students have engaged in activities spelled out in the

legislation. There are also policy requirements that require principals to report specified violent incidents to the police. This legislation would ensure that school staff also have clear direction in reporting to the principal.

I want to be clear that these changes will formalize something that is already common practice in the province. Students should feel comfortable reporting incidents to staff knowing that they will then be followed up on, and parents should feel comfortable knowing the incidents will be responded to appropriately.

This legislation would also require principals to contact the parents of victims of student incidents when suspension or expulsion must be considered—so that same type of incident where we're going to require, if this legislation is passed, that principals must contact the parents of the victims. Parents have a right to know when their child is a victim of serious behaviour. They cannot advocate for their child and work with the school to resolve these issues if they're unaware that these types of incidents are taking place. If passed, Ontario would be the first province in Canada with legislation of this kind, requiring school staff to report serious student incidents to the principal and requiring principals to notify parents of victims.

Finally, the legislation would require staff to intervene to address inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour amongst students, behaviour such as racist or sexist comments that are unacceptable in our schools. We would, of course, only require them to do this if it is safe to do so. This may include asking the student to stop the behaviour, identifying the type of behaviour and why it's inappropriate and disrespectful and asking the student for a change in future behaviour. If passed, the legislation would help make schools even safer and lead the way for students to succeed.

Le projet de loi, « sécurité de nos enfants à l'école », ne constitue qu'une étape.

Nous progressons également dans nombre d'autres domaines ciblés par les recommandations de l'équipe d'action, tels que le curriculum, l'amélioration des partenariats entre les conseils scolaires et les organismes communautaires, et le développement de sondages sur le climat scolaire.

We will continue to act to help ensure everyone feels welcome, safe and respected in all of our schools.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

STUDENT SAFETY

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm pleased to rise on behalf of our education critic, Joyce Savoline, the member from Burlington, who has fought hard to make the changes in order to make our schools safe and has been demanding mandatory reporting. I'm pleased that the McGuinty government is finally listening; however, I am disappointed that the amendments do not come into force on September 1 of this year as we had hoped, but rather one year from now, February 2010.

Today is a day to pay tribute to the strength and the fortitude of the families who have fought for years to see

justice for their children and the protection of all students in our schools. We also today must remember the bravery of the children who have suffered violence and abuse at the hands of their fellow students and who have had the courage to share their heart-wrenching stories. As a parent, I can tell you, that had to be very difficult.

We remember Daniel Sebben, who contemplated suicide because nobody could protect him at school; Lindsay Hyde, who was terrified for her life because she could not escape her tormentors. It is unbelievable that in this day and age these children had to go through those types of experiences.

It is time—it is overdue—that this government demonstrate leadership and take every possible step to protect our students. Since my colleagues and I have started to highlight the need for mandatory reporting, students have been coming forward with their stories of abuse. Clearly, this is a dark part of our education system that we need to continue to address.

So we hope that the parents of the victims will be notified. We need to make sure that all of our students will be safe from their abusers. We need to establish clear rules for the creation and enforcement of safety plans following incidents of violence and abuse. We need to remember that we have failed children like Daniel and Lindsay in the past, and the countless other children who have not been able to step forward or the parents who simply couldn't publicly identify their children.

Parents should not have had to fight for three years to keep their children safe from perpetrators on any government's watch. As parents, we always need to know that the government is doing everything in its power to protect our children while they are in our care. Regrettably, many of these parents and these children have been let down, and as we know from the stories that we're hearing, children—their lives—have been put at risk.

What has added insult to injury is that when the violence or the abuse has been discovered, no one in this school system or the ministry, in the past, has been able or willing to accept any responsibility or accountability, and the poor at-risk student and the parents have been totally left to fend for themselves. We've heard the stories. Again, I say to you that this has to be heart-breaking for any parent, and I can't imagine what the impact must have been on the children and continues to be to this day.

So we want every serious incident of violence and abuse to be reported to the parents and to the proper authorities. We want to make sure that an action plan is put in place immediately and enforced. It has to happen for the sake of the students.

We also need to take a look at those who have perpetrated the offences. We need to take whatever action we can with children, and we need to support those children too. Children who are nine years of age—or anywhere, younger or older—are too young to be tarred with the brush of a sexual deviant. The students deserve our help. They deserve counselling and support systems to resolve and monitor their issues now or we will see these

children later in the system, in one form or another, for the rest of their lives.

So let's work together. Let's be proactive about the future of our youth. Our students—every one of them—deserve a safe, secure learning environment. It is time now to deliver, not in February, but September 1 of this year.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mr. Rosario Marchese: We will, of course, be supporting this bill. I have a few positive remarks and a few negative ones as well, because I want to be balanced, as the Liberals would say often, regarding any issue.

Our students must be able to attend school without fear. We want our kids to be safe. Who doesn't? Parents have a right to know what is happening to their kids, particularly when there are incidents that require their attention. We know that we can't call parents for every single conflict that their child is involved in. We can't do that. Teachers cannot do that. The system would crawl to a halt if every incident was reported or had to be reported.

At the other end, there are serious incidents where calling parents is automatic, ought to be automatic, and necessary.

1330

What we all need is a way to judge all the incidents that are in between. Educators need direction to help determine what needs to be reported and what does not. Obviously, we're going to support anything that will assist educators to protect our children and keep our parents informed. Much will depend on the definition of "reportable incident." Teachers are already required, as the minister said, "to report suspected cases of child abuse to the principal who then has the responsibility to report externally. In situations of violent incidents among students, the practice is for teachers to report to the principal. The legislation clarifies that responsibility." That's good; that's fine, which is what the minister said.

In my experience as a former teacher and as a critic for a long time, teachers do report violent problems when they happen. It's in their interest to do so, to protect themselves, if nothing else, and to protect those young people. So of course reporting happens; whether or not there's support at the higher level is sometimes another question, but even then, principals, of course, have a lot to do and they have to use their judgment. In some cases, they may fail in their judgment in that regard, but in my experience, most teachers have done the job of reporting. But if this codifies it and helps them, God bless.

I do want to say that mandatory reporting doesn't deal with the issues that we should be talking about. Mandatory reporting doesn't deal with issues of mental illness. Mandatory reporting doesn't deal with kids who come to school, where in their family there's substance abuse or alcohol abuse. It doesn't deal with that. Many of these things bring violence to the school. Some of these kids are sexually abused, and some of these kids bring the violence into the school. Mandatory reporting doesn't

deal with that. The Liberals and Tories might say, "Well, that's not what they're supposed to be doing," but we should be talking about what we should be doing to prevent problems before we're in a situation where teachers are forced to report a violent or difficult problem. So reporting is good, but it doesn't address the causes of youth violence.

Dealing with youth violence requires more than accurate reporting and putting police in a few schools. We would like to see legislation that puts more support staff, social workers, psychologists and other people who deal with mental illness in our school system as a way of reducing tensions that contribute to violence. The Toronto District School Board's community safety advisory panel, chaired by Julian Falconer, also recommended the creation of a provincial school safety and equity officer to be a central repository for the reporting of serious issues of school safety. I think it's a good idea. We have not heard the minister respond to that recommendation made by Julian Falconer. We don't know whether the minister or the Liberals will ever speak to many of the recommendations made by Falconer; they claim they have, but 80% of what was in that report is still yet to be addressed. The one I just mentioned is a critical one.

We feel that this is an essential step in dealing with violence, and we would like to see it included in the legislation. We hope the minister and the Liberals will speak to these issues more than just doing mandatory reporting.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Mr. Stu Auty has arrived. I introduced him earlier. Thank you for being here.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That was not a point of order. The government House leader on a point of order.

L'hon. Monique M. Smith: Je crois que nous avons le consentement unanime pour chaque parti politique de faire un discours de cinq minutes pour célébrer la Journée internationale de la francophonie.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF LA FRANCOPHONIE

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Au cours de la prochaine semaine, nous allons célébrer la Journée internationale de la francophonie, une fête qui a lieu chaque année le 20 mars partout dans le monde.

Over 9.5 million francophones live in our country, and many have roots in Ontario that go back nearly 400 years.

Le gouvernement de l'Ontario accorde une grande importance à la promotion et à l'épanouissement des francophones dans la province. D'ailleurs, ici même à l'Assemblée législative, la valeur du français est reconnue grâce au respect que l'on voue à la langue française et à la culture francophone, ce qui a des répercussions sur

l'ensemble de l'appareil gouvernemental et la société ontarienne.

Le gouvernement investit des sommes importantes dans l'éducation en langue française. En retour, les résultats scolaires des élèves francophones et francophiles sont parmi les meilleurs en Ontario, ce qui fait honneur à la province, tout en améliorant notre position sur la scène mondiale.

De même, le gouvernement accorde une priorité élevée à la qualité et à l'accès aux soins de santé en français partout en Ontario. Les investissements majeurs touchent à la formation bilingue des professionnels de la santé, à la diversification des services de santé et aux installations physiques dans les communautés où il y a des francophones.

Depuis plusieurs années, le gouvernement a mis de l'avant des mesures créatrices pour améliorer le système de justice en français en Ontario.

Le gouvernement de l'Ontario reconnaît sa place unique dans la fédération canadienne. À ce titre, il joue un rôle d'avant-plan dans les grands dossiers de la francophonie canadienne. Par exemple, il y a deux ans nous avons créé le Commissariat aux services en français, et plusieurs provinces nous ont approchés pour s'en inspirer.

Nous savons tous que l'unité du Canada dépend largement de l'espace occupé par les trois peuples fondateurs dans nos institutions politiques et nos services publics. C'est pour cette raison que le gouvernement participe activement aux rencontres interministérielles de la francophonie canadienne qui rassemblent les Acadiens, les francophones de l'ouest, les Franco-Ontariens et les Québécois.

Le gouvernement accorde une grande valeur à sa relation avec le Québec, comme en font foi les ententes Québec-Ontario que le gouvernement a conclues récemment. Les liens culturels et économiques que nous tissons avec les Québécois et les Québécoises contribuent à la prospérité de l'Ontario.

I would also like to tell you about the celebrations for the International Day of la Francophonie that will be taking place on March 20. Here in Ontario, the theme for this celebration will be our rich and diverse francophone community. It is a well-known fact that the population of French Ontario is growing through the arrival of new francophones and francophiles.

L'Ontario se démarque encore une fois par son ouverture sur le monde en recevant à bras ouverts des femmes, des hommes et des enfants parlant le français, d'où qu'ils viennent : de l'Afrique de l'ouest, du Maghreb, des Caraïbes ou de l'Europe.

J'invite tous mes collègues députés à participer activement aux fêtes qui entoureront la Journée internationale de la francophonie dans leur comté.

Encore cette année, les Ontariens et Ontariennes vont célébrer la francophonie aux quatre coins de la province. À North Bay et à Chapleau se tiendra l'exposition itinérante sur la francophonie ontarienne au cours de la semaine prochaine. À Embrun ce samedi, la francophonie ontarienne se réunira dans le cadre du 11^e banquet annuel

de la francophonie de Prescott et Russell, auquel j'assisterai en compagnie de près de 500 convives. Le 19 mars, la télé de Radio-Canada sera l'hôte du gala Trille Or, durant lequel l'Association des professionnels de la chanson et de la musique fera la promotion tous azimuts de la musique et de la chanson franco-ontarienne. La pièce de théâtre Terre d'accueil, de la troupe de La Vieille 17, sera en tournée partout en Ontario. À Sudbury, les jeunes vont célébrer La Nuit sur l'étang le 21 mars prochain.

De plus, ici même dans la fonction publique de l'Ontario, nous allons reconnaître les employés qui se démarquent dans la prestation de services en français ou bilingues. À l'aube de la grande fête qui se prépare, tous ensemble nous allons bientôt célébrer les 400 ans de présence francophone en Ontario, et l'aventure se poursuit grâce à la jeunesse francophone, qui transforme à son tour tout l'Ontario, une jeunesse dont le gouvernement a fait sa priorité en élaborant une stratégie jeunesse qui a pour but de créer une mobilisation générale rassemblant la communauté, les intervenants de la francophonie et la population.

1340

On International Day of la Francophonie, I invite every Ontarian to celebrate the invaluable contribution of francophones to our prosperity.

À tous et à toutes, je souhaite une bonne journée de la francophonie le 20 mars et une bonne semaine de la francophonie.

M. Peter Shurman: Comme pays, le Canada est officiellement bilingue, mais trop souvent nos racines francophones prennent une position secondaire. Notamment, ici dans notre province de l'Ontario, il est oublié de temps en temps que nous avons deux nations fondatrices, dont les Franco-Ontariens sont des partenaires égaux. Le Canada était, de plus, un des fondateurs de la francophonie il y a 39 ans.

La semaine prochaine, nous ne serons pas ici, et c'est pour cette raison que nous voulons attirer l'attention aujourd'hui sur la francophonie, une célébration mondiale fêtée chaque année par les francophones de cinq continents et par l'Organisation internationale de la francophonie.

Comme membre fondateur de la francophonie dans l'année 1970, le Canada va célébrer cette Journée internationale de la francophonie dans la région d'Ottawa-Gatineau avec un hommage aux Acadiens. Nous voulons souligner notre soutien pour le quatrième Congrès mondial acadien dans le mois d'août 2009. Les ambassades des différents pays francophones du monde entier sont les hôtes d'activités culturelles pour célébrer la journée de la francophonie, avec l'objectif de promouvoir et la langue française et la communauté internationale des 53 États membres de la francophonie. Le français est la langue officielle de 32 des États et des gouvernements; c'est la langue d'à peu près 200 millions de personnes du monde.

Il me semble que nous sommes ici véritablement un miroir du monde. Mais cela n'a pas pris longtemps pour les Anglais et les Français d'être ensemble pour créer les

conditions favorables pour notre propre fondation. Dans notre histoire et aujourd'hui, nous pouvons dire que notre communauté franco-ontarienne fait partie d'une communauté mondiale vaste, complexe, inclusive et ouverte. De temps en temps, on doit se souvenir que les résultats et les bénéfices pour nous, maintenant en 2009, ne sont pas seulement justifiés, mais extrêmement appréciés, parce que deux peuples ont fixé un objectif, ont commencé une tâche, ont maintenu un défi avec patience et ont montré une habileté commune de maintenir le cours face aux obstacles durant des siècles. Je peux dire que notre histoire et les histoires des autres membres de la francophonie sont unies pour toujours.

Il est important de se souvenir que les objectifs de la francophonie sont les mêmes que les nôtres ici en Ontario durant notre grande histoire : promouvoir la langue française, aider les pays du monde français où il y a un besoin d'aide économique, médicale, sociale ou n'importe laquelle. Nous avons la connaissance, et c'est notre devoir et notre nature.

À l'image de la population de l'Ontario, la population franco-ontarienne est diverse et vibrante. Elle accueille depuis de nombreuses années des francophones de l'Afrique, de l'Asie, du Moyen-Orient et de l'Europe. Les minorités raciales francophones représentent aujourd'hui 10,3 % de la population francophone de la province. Alors, nos racines franco-ontariennes sont maintenant vraiment mondiales—une réflexion de la francophonie partout. La francophonie ontarienne tire son dynamisme de la présence de nombreuses institutions et associations dans les domaines de l'éducation, de la culture, de la santé, de la justice, de l'économie et des communications.

Nous avons en Ontario la fierté et la confiance d'être une force majeure dans la francophonie du monde. De la part de l'opposition officielle, je souhaite et à la communauté franco-ontarienne et aux francophones du monde entier une célébration magnifique pour la journée de la francophonie le vendredi 20 mars.

M. Rosario Marchese: Je suis très fier, comme francophile, de participer aujourd'hui à la célébration de la semaine internationale de la francophonie. La Journée internationale de la francophonie se célèbre le 20 mars, car c'est le 20 mars 1970 à Niamey, au Niger, qu'a été signé le traité créant l'Agence de coopération culturelle et technique, ce que nous appelons aujourd'hui l'Organisation internationale de la francophonie.

L'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario est membre de l'Organisation internationale de la francophonie, et comme député je suis membre de l'Association des parlementaires francophones, un organisme regroupant plus de 80 pays et 120 parlements où le français est utilisé dans les débats parlementaires.

Ma collègue la députée de Nickel Belt, France Gélinas, mon collègue Gilles Bisson de Timmins-Baie-James et moi avons eu l'occasion de participer à certaines de leurs activités, et c'est avec fierté que nous avons clamé haut et fort que, oui, la francophonie existe et est bien vivante en Ontario; que depuis l'établissement de la mission de Sainte-Marie-au-pays-des-Hurons, en 1639, il

y a une présence française en Ontario; et que 50 % des francophones à l'extérieur du Québec se trouvent en Ontario. Nous en avons bien sûr profité pour faire reconnaître la chanson et la musique, la littérature et le théâtre franco-ontariens.

La francophonie ontarienne est de plus en plus diversifiée. En effet, l'Ontario accueille depuis de nombreuses années des francophones des quatre coins du monde. L'Ontario est peut-être le chef de file pour le thème de cette année qui met en valeur la diversité.

Dans ce contexte, je veux mentionner M^{me} Tonia Mori, de Toronto, qui sera récipiendaire de l'Ordre de la Pléiade. Elle est à la barre de la Coopérative radio-phonique de Toronto depuis 2006 comme directrice générale. Elle a développé en mars 2008 le portail francophone « ma ville en français », www.grandtoronto.ca. Pour Tonia Mori, il est capital de pouvoir rassembler et desservir les différentes communautés francophones multiculturelles de Toronto, de contrer l'assimilation chez les jeunes et de favoriser le développement de la culture et des talents franco-ontariens et canadiens.

Mais il y a aussi des lacunes. Une lacune que ma collègue de Nickel Belt a soulevée plus tôt cette semaine est la piètre qualité du français sur le site web de l'Assemblée législative. Le texte est cousu de fautes, et même les noms des députés francophones ne respectent pas les accents de la langue française. On a beau essayer de promouvoir le fait français en Ontario, c'est assez difficile d'être pris au sérieux lorsque nos outils de communication les plus utilisés, sont inadéquats. Il faut changer ça. Le français est toléré à l'Assemblée législative mais il n'est certainement pas utilisé couramment, ni encouragé.

Je veux encourager tous les francophones et francophiles à se joindre aux nombreuses activités organisées afin de souligner la semaine de la francophonie. Pour ceux qui seront dans le coin de Sudbury, il y aura le film Babine, au Rainbow Centre, un dîner de la francophonie au centre de santé communautaire, une présentation de folklore du professeur Marcel Bénéteau, du département de folklore de l'Université de Sudbury, et bien d'autres.

Pour ceux qui se trouvent à Toronto, consultez le Centre francophone de Toronto : site web www.centre-franco.org, et aussi www.lexpress.to.

Je veux terminer en disant à ceux qui ne parlent qu'une langue, l'unilinguisme peut être guéri.

1350

PETITIONS

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act" as above "to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the Clerks' table.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It was presented to me by the members of the Braemar Women's Institute in Oxford county.

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance; and

"Whereas the removal of the temporary care assistance could mean that children will be forced into foster care; and

"Whereas the temporary care assistance amounted to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would receive to look after the same children if they were forced into foster care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse the decision to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren."

Thank you very much for allowing me to present this petition on behalf of my constituents.

LUPUS

Mr. Kim Craitor: I am pleased to introduce the following petition on behalf of the Lupus Foundation of Ontario, located in my riding of Ridgeway. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

I'm proud to sign my signature in support.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly signed by people from all over Mississauga, and a couple from Toronto, just for good measure. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am pleased to sign and support this petition and, on her last week with us, to ask page Emily to carry it for me.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the current Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital is fully utilized; and

"Whereas Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital was sized to serve a town of Oakville population of 130,000, and the current population is now 170,000; and

"Whereas the population of Oakville continues to grow as mandated by 'Places to Grow,' an act of the Ontario Legislature, and is projected to be 187,500 in 2012, the completion date for a new facility in the original time frame; and

"Whereas residents of the town of Oakville are entitled to the same quality of health care as all Ontarians; and

"Whereas hospital facilities in the surrounding area do not have capacity to absorb Oakville's overflow needs;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure the new Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital be completed under its original timelines without further delay."

I agree with this petition, affix my signature to it and pass it to my page, Nancy, on her last day.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas too many innocent people are being victimized by acts of violence while using public transit; and

"Whereas too many public transit employees are being victimized by acts of violence while working to serve the public; and

"Whereas we need to send a strong message of zero tolerance for violence on public transit; and

"Whereas anyone harming or carrying a weapon on public transit should be dealt with by the full force of the law; and

"Whereas public transit riders and workers have the right to ride and work on public transit free of violence, intimidation and harm;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to put an end to violence on public transit and totally support MPP Mike Colle's private member's bill," Bill 151, "to crack down on violence on public transit."

I support the bill and the petition. Thank you.

SALES TAX

Mr. Frank Klees: I have literally thousands of signatures here sent to me through, mainly, car dealerships from across the province. The petition reads as follows:

"Whereas the auto industry in Ontario and throughout North America is experiencing a major restructuring; and

"Whereas the current economic crisis is affecting the auto manufacturers and the front-line dealerships throughout Ontario; and

"Whereas many potential automobile purchasers are having difficulty accessing credit even at current prices; and

"Whereas a three-month tax holiday of the GST and the PST on the purchase of new and used cars and trucks would stimulate auto sales;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the provincial and federal governments to implement a three-month tax holiday, and that the Ontario Minister of Finance include the PST holiday in the next provincial budget."

I'm pleased to affix my signature, as I believe it's a very important measure for the Minister of Finance to include in the next budget.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to introduce this petition for a second time in the House today. I want to thank Olga Alexander from Whitby, who provided me with these petitions. The petition is effectually known as the grandparents' right petition, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents, as requested in Bill 33....

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

I'm proud to sign my signature in support of this petition.

1400

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the ability of local animal welfare groups to use the identifier Humane Society or Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals unless they are affiliated with the provincial organization; and

"Whereas many local organizations which adopted these names have operated under them for many years; and

"Whereas the volunteers and local support of these historic organizations is invaluable to the cause of animal welfare in Ontario;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to remove the proposed restriction of the use of these identifiers currently proposed in section 6 of Bill 50."

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Bob Delaney: I am pleased to read this petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on behalf of my colleague from Perth–Wellington. It is entitled "Safety-Net Payments and Beginning/Expanding Farmers." It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs ... has publicly stated that she 'absolutely' wants to help the beginning and new entrants to agriculture; and

"Whereas beginning and expanding farmers are going to be important in the coming decade, as a record number of producers are expected to leave the industry; and

"Whereas the safety net payments—i.e., Ontario cattle, hog and horticulture payments (OCHHP)—are based on historical averages, and many beginning and expanding farmers were not in business or just starting up in the period so named and thus do not have reflective historic allowable net sales; and

"Whereas beginning and expanding producers are likely at the greatest risk of being financially disadvantaged by poor market conditions and are being forced to exit agriculture because there is not a satisfactory safety-net program or payment that meets their needs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately adjust the safety-net payments made via OCHHP to include beginning and expanding farmers, and make a relief payment to the beginning and expanding farmers that have been missed or received seriously disproportionate payments, thereby preventing beginning farmers from exiting the agriculture sector."

On behalf of the member for Perth–Wellington, I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition and send it down with page Tariq on his last week with us.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Milton District Hospital was designed to serve a population of 30,000 people and the town of

Milton is now home to more than 75,000 people and is still growing rapidly; and

"Whereas the town of Milton is the fastest-growing town in Canada and was forced into that rate of growth by an act of the Ontario Legislature called 'Places to Grow'; and

"Whereas the town of Milton is projected to have a population of 101,600 people in 2014, which is the earliest date an expansion could be completed; and

"Whereas the current Milton facility is too small to accommodate Milton's explosive growth and parts of the hospital prohibit the integration of new outpatient clinics and diagnostic technologies;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure timely approval and construction of the expansion to Milton District Hospital."

I approve of this petition, sign my name to it and pass it to my page, Jordan.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

INACTIVE CEMETERIES PROTECTION ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA PROTECTION DES CIMETIÈRES INACTIFS

Mr. Brownell moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 149, An Act to protect Ontario's inactive cemeteries / Projet de loi 149, Loi visant à protéger les cimetières inactifs de l'Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Brownell has moved second reading of Bill 149. Pursuant to standing order 98, Mr. Brownell, you have up to 12 minutes.

Mr. Jim Brownell: It is a pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon to speak on my private member's bill, Bill 149, the Inactive Cemeteries Protection Act. The purpose of this bill is to preserve the sanctity of the final resting places of our deceased and to provide clear legislation that inactive cemeteries are protected, preserved and maintained in their original locations.

At this time I would like to introduce and welcome to the Legislature this afternoon Marjorie Stuart, Diane Clendenan, Rob Leverty and Bob Crawford from the Ontario Historical Society and the Ontario Genealogical Society, and also John Sheehan from the Citizens for the Protection and Preservation of the Pioneer Cemetery in the riding of Peterborough. I welcome them as we debate this afternoon. I sincerely thank them, too, for their support of this bill.

I would also like to acknowledge the good work of the former Minister of Culture, Caroline Di Cocco. It was

she who, before she was minister, devised a bill that was never tabled similar to the one that we are debating here today. Although the two bills are different, her bill certainly provided inspiration for Bill 149, and I commend her for her contribution. For many years now, it has been my contention that descendants of our deceased and those organizations opposing the closure and move of inactive cemeteries should not continuously fight with developers, the courts and tribunals to preserve the sanctity and last wishes of our ancestors.

Along with my colleagues who are debating with me today, I would like to commend all those from across Ontario, and indeed across Canada, who are in support of this bill and have taken the time to contact my office. To date, my office has received hundreds of letters, e-mails, telephone calls and petitions.

It is because I believe that this bill is in the best interests of our constituents that we are debating it here today. The support I've received from those concerned citizens confirms that people care about our deceased family members and the burial locations where they rest.

As many of you know, I am a proud advocate for the conservation of the rich history and heritage of Ontario, and indeed of all of Canada. As a past president of the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Historical Society and the Cornwall Township Historical Society, and having served 11 years as president of the Lost Villages Historical Society in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, I have had much involvement in all aspects of history and heritage preservation. Bill 149, with the protection of inactive cemeteries, is certainly something I have been interested in for many years and is an extension of my community work and advocacy.

The Inactive Cemeteries Act has a great impact on the culture and heritage of our province, but it also affects other aspects of our way of life here in Ontario. This bill, in addition to preserving the history of our province, will also provide clear legislation to developers on where they can or cannot build in regard to the location of our cemeteries. It will protect valuable green spaces and the various species of plants and animals that live within our inactive cemeteries. It will acknowledge the benefits of our cemeteries when adjacent to our park systems or forested areas as places to engage in physical and leisure activities. It will allow organizations such as the Ontario Historical Society and the Ontario Genealogical Society to focus on what they do best: research, documentation and preservation, instead of fighting legal battles to protect these sites and spending huge sums of money in these battles.

For example, the battle in support of preserving the Clendenen Cemetery in its original location in the town of Markham is a familiar battle that the two said organizations fought and were successful. Thank goodness the Ontario Historical Society is supported through the financial generosity of donors through their cemetery defence fund.

This bill will provide peace of mind to the citizens of this province, knowing their families' and ancestors'

burial sites will not be disturbed and they will remain accessible to future generations. I know that my mother is watching today, and I know that when my parents chose their final resting place at St. Andrews West, Ontario, they did so expecting that their mortal remains would lie there forever.

As you can see, the history and heritage contained in Ontario's inactive cemeteries is but one aspect of this bill, and one that is close to my heart. These burial grounds contain not only great historical figures but also the pioneering souls who opened our province to future generations. These cemeteries lay out the various ethnic and cultural heritages of our province and provide us with our current identity of freedom and acceptance. To visit one of these inactive cemeteries is a journey back in time to when these great citizens were forging the communities that we live in today. As indicated in the preamble to the act, Ontario's cemeteries are unique repositories of human history and the resting places of human remains and associated artifacts like grave markers, tombstones and monuments. They are important elements of our collective heritage, a priceless, authentic historical record of the past and witnesses to the continuity of life in Ontario.

1410

I would like to read an e-mail that I received from Dawn Leggett in support of Bill 149:

"Thank you for introducing Bill 149, Inactive Cemeteries Protection Act, 2009 in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. We who have been and continue to be interested in preserving these sacred places are most grateful to you.

"I belong to the Friends of Christ Church, 7th Line, Vespra (Simcoe county) trying to ensure that this little historic cemetery is not lost and will continue to be remembered. It is the burying ground of the Reverend Canon Edward Morgan, who came, along with his family, from the West Indies to Simcoe county and planted many Anglican churches in the area. By rights, this cemetery should have an Ontario heritage plaque commemorating his tireless work.

"Our history of the restoration of this cemetery contains the following quote: 'Show me your cemeteries and I will tell you what kind of people you have.' Benjamin Franklin, 1706-1790. I believe that our descendants will be very pleased with your work on behalf of their ancestors.

"Thank you again. We will follow the progress of this bill with great interest."

There are hundreds of stories just like Ms. Leggett's across our province, and it saddens me that the greatest threat to these historic sites is the human race and our tendency to place the illusion of economic growth before less tangible benefits to our society.

To this end, this bill also aims to show that economic growth can flourish without the desecration of our forefathers' burial grounds. This happened here in Ontario when Richview Cemetery found itself situated in the middle of the interchange of Highways 427 and 401,

not far from Pearson airport. Engineers designed and redesigned the ramps and road networks to preserve the cemetery and the sanctity of this site.

This bill will establish clearly what we, the descendants of the deceased, cannot develop inactive cemeteries and that we cannot close and move them at random. It will eliminate lawsuits, fights and tiresome squabbles over these sacred sites. Here are two examples to illustrate my point.

In Toronto, part of the grounds of the original St. James' Cathedral on Church Street was planned to be sold to a condominium developer who planned to move the cemetery, so as to clear the land. Public outcry ensued, and a deal was made to sell off a parking lot north-west of the church instead.

In another story, John Haynes and his family banded together to prevent bulldozers from destroying the Haynes family burial ground, with graves dating from 1784 to 1860. Some graves were disturbed when the city of St. Catharines commenced building a recreational centre on the site, disregarding a 1974 bylaw whereby the city "undertook to provide for the maintenance, management, regulation, control of certain cemeteries including the Haynes cemetery."

The history of this family and a piece of our provincial heritage placed at risk for a recreational centre? Hard to believe, but it is true.

The battles just outlined took countless man-hours and thousands of dollars to preserve and protect the sanctity of these sites. If there had been clear legislation stating that these gravesites could not be disturbed, these battles could have been avoided, saving tax dollars and the time and money of the developers and also of historical societies and citizens' groups that are given the arduous task of fighting on behalf of our deceased.

These cemeteries thus remain accessible to the citizens of Ontario. They cannot be overrun by urban sprawl or commercial development. They deserve to exist in a natural state so our citizens can appreciate the heritage and culture they provide.

According to a document on the Ministry of Culture website, many cemeteries promote recreational use of their grounds by welcoming hikers, cyclists, photographers and bird watchers, and by organizing walking tours and outdoor chamber music concerts. Cemeteries can supplement community park systems and enhance adjacent public open spaces.

This type of activity draws to mind Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Toronto. Although it is not an inactive cemetery, many of these recreational uses are undertaken at that site, and I shudder to think what this location would be like if it was ever moved or desecrated, because some day that cemetery will close. While the bill is entitled the Inactive Cemeteries Protection Act, it affects all current burial grounds as well, as they too will eventually fall idle.

This same document from the Ministry of Culture has referred to our cemeteries as outdoor classrooms. Many of our outdoor cemeteries, such as the Red Cloud Ceme-

tery in Northumberland township—the descendants of those buried there had to go to court to prevent its destruction—are home to rare species of plants and animals, as well as the final resting places of our deceased ancestors and family members. These ecosystems that developed in these burial grounds, due to their peaceful and lush environments, have existed for perhaps 100 years. They are bastions of life for the living, made possible by being the final resting places of our deceased. These valued deceased still resonate within their own families and communities. They are examples of hard work and pioneering spirit.

In an e-mail to me from a strong supporter of Bill 149, Michael Harrison of Toronto states: "I am writing to let you know" that I support your bill.

"I strongly believe that the final resting places of our ancestors should be respected and protected.

"I also have a personal connection to this. My great-great grandmother and her child are buried on my great-great grandfather's farm in Brampton that is now subject to a development application. In this case, I have known about the cemetery for over 20 years and ended up getting it registered so that it was known and will now be protected, but since that date the province has changed the rules and now only permits the property owner to register cemeteries. Had that been the case then, I doubt I could have persuaded owners of the property—who were holding it for development—to register the cemetery and it would have been dug up and moved. A terrible travesty as far as I am concerned. These pioneers built the country we all live in and we desecrate their final resting place!

"Anyway, this bill would ensure that all unregistered cemeteries are protected for the future—and there are thousands out there."

I could go on. I have a few more comments to make, and I'm sure in my wrap-up I'll have time to end it with a poem that I think very much expresses what I'm talking about today: that we must, as a province, protect inactive cemeteries in our province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: It's a real pleasure to support this bill that has been introduced by MPP Jim Brownell from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, An Act to protect Ontario's inactive cemeteries. This act, if passed, would override anything in any other act or regulation that addresses the relocation of inactive cemeteries. I would just like to inform the Speaker that I will be supporting this bill. I believe places of burial should be protected, and I do believe a person's resting place should be their final resting place, so I'm quite supportive.

It was interesting, when I took a look at the legislation, to know that Mr. Brownell had previously tabled another private member's bill regarding cemeteries as well, and that was Bill 25, An Act to preserve the gravesites of former Premiers of Ontario, which our caucus supported as well. I don't think we've seen the passage of that bill yet, but again, that would have given recognition to the

gravesites of former Ontario Premiers, and it would have committed to the preservation of those gravesites as well. Under Parks Canada, the federal government has recognized the gravesites of Canada's former Prime Ministers, and I think it is important.

As a former history teacher, part of what we used to do sometimes was visit some of the cemeteries. There's a tremendous amount of history to be found. There's a lot that you can learn about a community—their way of life and what they may have done during their lifetime—and so I think that our cemeteries are very valuable. We need to preserve them. They are a very important component of our heritage and our culture, and they do provide a valuable resource to the historians, the genealogists and the general public, people who have an interest.

I always find it interesting, as well, not only to visit some of the cemeteries in our own province, but when you go south of the border. Our neighbours take great pride and do preserve their cemeteries. Again, there's a great story to be told about the people who have come before us.

This bill, if it is passed, will establish as well some very clear-cut, upfront regulations to any potential developers in order that they don't do planning that may be unnecessary and could incur some additional costs. It will also provide families and descendants with peace of mind, knowing that their loved ones and their ancestors will not ever be disinterred. As well, we have important societies, the Ontario Historical Society and the Ontario Genealogical Society, which now have the opportunity to spend the money that they have, the hard-earned and valuable funds that they have, in conservation and the preservation of our province's history and heritage, rather than having to spend thousands of dollars fighting in courts for the rights of deceased Ontarians—and that is the right and respect of the final resting place.

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Many people in communities today, particularly as we continue to see expansion of growth and expansion of development in communities such as Toronto and the GTA, of course, come to cemeteries and walk. They're very valuable recreational spaces. They're also very valuable green spaces, and they're home to many rare species and many different types of plants and animals. So this bill would maintain the ecosystems that are housed in the cemetery grounds; they provide a valuable resource to our communities in many respects.

This is a bill which we will probably all support. I know that I will, and I congratulate the member for bringing it forward and thank him.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's a real pleasure to speak to this bill, I have to say, and it's a pleasure as well to listen to all the different members who are going to speak to this bill, because we all have a history in one way or another. So far, we're going to get a whole lot of Liberals to support it, which is good; we've got the Conservatives who are supporting this, which is good; and New Demo-

crats, which is good—until you wonder, “Where was the problem around this?” as we review this historically. I want to help you with that brief review of the history around this.

Before I do, I want to congratulate the Ontario Genealogical Society, and in particular the Ontario Historical Society, for their incredible work on this issue, because they have been concerned about the identification and preservation of every aspect of Ontario's history for over a century. I'll make reference to them as I refer to some of the cases that I'm going to speak about.

We have all had a history in this regard. The Liberals introduced a bill in 1989, the new Cemeteries Act, and it was a very weak act. The Ontario Historical Society introduced many amendments which were rejected by the then-Liberal government. We carried on until New Democrats came into power, and I recall my involvement with this in the year that I was Minister of Culture, when I took an interest in cemeteries—and I was reminded of this by my friend Rob Levery from the Ontario Historical Society—where we said, “How do we create a strong Cemeteries Act that protects cemeteries?”

I remember dealing with that and dealing with the fact that I wanted to get on with the idea of having a strong heritage act. It took a long time to develop that as well, a long time. We've had a series of bills along the years, each one better, but, my God, does it ever take a long time to really create strong bills that create the tools to be able to preserve our heritage. And it doesn't come easy.

In 1992, therefore—just to talk about the history—we, the New Democrats, created the Ontario Cemeteries Act, where the owner of a cemetery could close a cemetery if it was in the public interest. The problem of the public interest is that we never really define it. So anyone, really, could define “the public interest” according to their own interest, rather than the public interest being that we will protect cemeteries at all costs. That needs to be defined today, still, so many years later, and that's what the Ontario Historical Society has been fighting for a long, long time.

One example of the public interest that was fought for years was the case in 1994 in the town of Markham where someone who owned a 100-acre farm in Markham applied to the province of Ontario to close and move a tiny pioneer cemetery located on the property. The problem was that the registrar of cemeteries for Ontario agreed that the Clendennen Cemetery, as it was known, could indeed be moved. Understand this: The registrar of cemeteries agreed that it could be moved. They're the people charged to protect cemeteries, and they agreed that it could be moved. So you wonder: Who was there to protect cemeteries, except for people like the Ontario Historical Society, which had to try to find support across Ontario, raise a few dollars and take it to court to be heard? It took years—three long years. At the end of it, at the end of spending \$100,000 from money raised from private donations, they were able to win that particular case. It was a landmark decision for heritage organizations that were involved and for every Ontarian who cared about the rich history of Ontario.

In 2001, the province ordered that it was in the public interest for the St. Alban's Anglican Cemetery to be partially relocated for real estate development. Understand: It was the province that said that it's okay, that it's in the public interest to move the cemetery. This case was successfully appealed by the Ontario Historical Society to the Licence Appeal Tribunal, which ruled against the registrar, cemeteries branch. Remember it—the registrar, cemeteries branch, which you would think is there to protect and preserve cemeteries.

The government of Ontario was discredited, and it cost the taxpayers of Ontario a great deal of money to justify and promote, at public and private hearings, a real estate development on a historical cemetery. It cost the Ontario Historical Society 120,000 bucks. Imagine. They had to raise \$120,000 to fight that legal battle against the province. Finding money isn't easy, as you all know, but that's why I want to give them credit because if it wasn't for them, that public interest would have been lost.

We need to define "the public interest" as it relates to the protection and preservation of all cemeteries, designated or not, because even those cemeteries that are designated have no protection. They can easily be undesignated. We need to preserve all of them, and we have close to 4,000 or 5,000 such cemeteries.

So it's a real pleasure today to support the member's bill from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry because I think it's a good bill. I don't want to say that in 2006—but I have to—we were dealing with the Ontario Heritage Act—actually 2005, it was—and Liberals and, I suspect, even civil servants were saying that the revisions to the Ontario Heritage Act in 2005 would protect Ontario's cemeteries, but they weren't and we were saying so in committee. Even Tories, whom we fought during their term, were in committee saying that we need to protect cemeteries. God bless. You see how things change as we go around the circle? But it was great; even the Tories agreed.

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We said that we needed to make sure that the cemeteries are protected, and we filed three main motions, which of course were rejected by the Liberals. Some of you remember that because you were there in committee with me. Some of you weren't, but some of you were. You know that they were rejected. Of course, many of you, who were not active and wouldn't know anything about it because you were not part of the committee, would say, "I don't know. I wasn't there. Therefore, I wasn't part of it." But it's a government initiative.

When you introduce a bill and you reject and oppose amendments that we make to protect cemeteries, it means that you, as a member of the government, opposed those amendments that would have strengthened the protection of our cemeteries. But why go back in history? Why do that? It doesn't really help, does it? We have to move forward, reflect on the positive and reflect on the fact that this is a private member's bill, and I want to support it. I don't know where the Minister of Culture is on this, but I assume the Minister of Culture probably is on board. I

could be wrong; I don't know. I suspect that she might be today; I don't know. We'll wait and see.

My suspicion is that the majority of Liberals today will support this bill. Am I correct? There is nodding around. That's a good thing. Why criticize the Liberals for what they didn't do? Let's focus on what the Liberals might do in the future.

Mr. Mike Colle: You didn't do it either.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I just gave a history, Michael. I just went through the brief history. I don't want to repeat it because we don't have much time.

I know that the member for Peterborough is likely to speak to this because he has a case in his own area, and I'm interested to listen to what he has to say.

We know that Ontario cemeteries are an important part of Ontario's history. I have to tell you, I'm not a religious man—I'm not.

Mr. Jeff Leal: God bless.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: "God bless" is an expression I use. It's true, I'm not a religious man, and it's not for this reason that I support this bill. I believe we need to respect our history, and I believe we need to respect our burial sites. It's part of who we are. I don't want any developer saying, "It is in the public interest for us to move these burial sites because I want to develop here and it's in the interest of the community to move these burial sites so that we can develop whatever we want."

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's not in my interest to do that.

Mr. Mike Colle: Tell us about where we're going.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: So where are we going with this bill? We are going to, as New Democrats, Tories and Liberals, move forward and support this bill, aren't we? And then we're going to talk to the minister or ministers involved—there are two ministries, right? Culture and Ontario government services, I suspect. So we need to get these two people to work together. I don't see how the ministers, once all three parties support this, are going to say no. I can't see it. Do you see that? I can't see it.

Member for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, thank you for introducing this motion. It's a very good one. It's a way to protect those inactive cemeteries that have no protection. As a New Democrat, I'm here today to say God bless, I am on your side, and I'm happy to hear Tories speak in support and happy to hear the Liberals in support. So we're all going in this together. Isn't that a beautiful thing? It's just so beautiful to see.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: It is indeed a pleasure for me to speak in support of Bill 149, which has been brought forward by my colleague the member for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

To put the Peterborough case in context, well over a decade ago, an individual came forward, Mr. David Edgerton, to build a new veterans' memorial adjacent to the cenotaph in Peterborough. The cenotaph in Peterborough is rather unique because it was designed by

Walter Allward. Walter Allward did very few designs within the Commonwealth countries. Of course, the most famous design that he was involved with was the memorial at Vimy Ridge. The cenotaph in Peterborough is obviously a very special place because of the unique design of the Allward memorial.

But over this period of time, it was revealed to us that to build this new veterans' memorial abutting the cenotaph in Peterborough, there would have to be very deep excavations done to support the black granite memorial. The concept was taken from the Vietnam memorial in Washington, DC. Anybody who has had the opportunity to visit that memorial knows the size of those granite walls. To support them would have meant a very deep excavation.

A project in my riding that should have been unifying in nature became somewhat divisive, because many of us who were born and raised in Peterborough knew—Mr. Sheehan, who is in the east Speaker's gallery today, brought it to our attention—that there was a pioneers' cemetery on this particular site. The ironic thing about that pioneers' cemetery—some of the ancestors that Mr. Edgerton wanted to put on the new veterans' memorial can be traced back to people who were buried during the War of 1812 in this pioneers' cemetery. For me, it was quite an education to have Mr. Sheehan and his colleagues come forward and indicate the number of people who were buried in this pioneers' cemetery.

The city of Peterborough brought forward an application to partially close the pioneers' cemetery. It was rejected by Mr. D'Mello, the registrar of cemeteries for the province of Ontario, and put us into a situation where we had to come up with a different design. Thank God that Mr. Sheehan and his colleagues came forward to explain to the population in the city of Peterborough and the county of Peterborough the need to preserve and respect those individuals who were buried in the pioneers' cemetery during 1812 to 1814. That's why I feel that this piece of legislation is so significant and needs to be passed: to protect individuals who are buried in these kinds of cemeteries.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I too want to add my support to the passage of second reading of Bill 149.

I've had a number of e-mails and letters coming in to my constituency office in support of this. I've had a number of genealogists come and talk to me about it. They are fully in support of this; in particular, a woman in my riding named Noreen Croxford. Noreen was involved in the development of a history book of the community of Watford-Warwick.

We see that a lot in rural ridings, where communities come together which want to preserve their histories. They ask the families to write about how they came to be there. They want to demonstrate where their history is, where they came from and how they have evolved into the communities they are today.

She listed for me a number of cemeteries in forests in the Lambton county area in particular that she had

discovered as she went through, doing the research work on the history book.

I am always very fascinated by history, so when these history books are written, I enjoy reading them. But what I also learned from Noreen, and actually have learned myself in my own travels, is what you can learn from walking through a cemetery. You can learn a lot about the history of the community there. Even as immigrants, with our own more recent histories, we see the changes when our groups of people came into this country, when the immigration came and you started to see that evolve. You can see when there was illness in the community. You can see where the illness affected children, because suddenly, at a certain time or period, there are a number of infant gravestones in the cemetery. All these things help us to remember, but also kind of lend some local flavour, a local sense of what happened in our communities.

Many times, we hear from people—I live in a house that was built in 1903, and the house has a wonderful history of its own. But the families who lived there, of course, are now buried in the local cemeteries, so going there to see tells me a lot about the families: the size of the family, the ages. You can see the tragedy that they lived through sometimes, when the children are buried too young, and parents; you see young mothers who didn't survive childbirth. You see that as well. All those things are there.

I have had, as I said, occasion to travel back to my own native country of Holland, the Netherlands, and had a chance to look in cemeteries there. It's amazing to see what our history is, and there the cemeteries are hundreds of years old.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: Just like the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, I have so much to say about this. I just want to say first that I'm very disappointed in the member, Jim Brownell, because he didn't mention, when he talked about Mount Pleasant, that Canada's longest-serving Prime Minister is there: William Lyon Mackenzie King. I invite everybody to visit Mount Pleasant for that. I have the pleasure of having Mount Pleasant near to where I live, and I jog through it quite frequently. You can see the most wonderful collection of trees; they're all marked, so it's a great place to learn about our wonderful trees in Ontario.

But again, we know about Jim's passion; he strongly believes in restoring and protecting things that are important. What could be more important than preserving the sanctity of our deceased friends, relatives and pioneers? That's what this bill is about.

I should mention that when he mentioned the bill to me, I thought of two of my favourite cemeteries in Toronto. One, the most unique one, is the Richview Memorial Cemetery—I bet you the Minister of Education doesn't know where that is. Where is it?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I don't know where it is.

Mr. Mike Colle: Highway 401 and Highway 427. It's stuck way up there, and it's probably at the busiest intersection in North America. There is a little cemetery; Richview cemetery has been there since about 1853. If you go by there—not when you're driving—just take a look at that cemetery. It has been restored just recently by the Etobicoke Historical Society.

My favourite cemetery is St. Michael's Cemetery, which is just up the street here, on Yonge Street. It's another—do you know, Minister of Education, where St. Michael's is? That's another quiz.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: On Yonge?

Mr. Mike Colle: Yonge, just south of St. Clair, in behind the Granite Club—

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: You can't see it.

Mr. Mike Colle: —and Imperial Oil. Anyway, there are over 25,000 people buried in that cemetery, the first Catholic cemetery. It's a wonderful place. There's great architecture there, by the way, by Joseph Sheard. I was talking to Mr. Sheehan from Peterborough, and his relatives are buried there at St. Michael's Cemetery.

So this bill is needed. It preserves things that are very sacred; it's our history, it's our families. Our pioneers are protected there when we protect these cemeteries. I think all of us understand that this is something that is very, very important for us to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm so very pleased to stand and support my colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry on the introduction and second reading of Bill 149, An Act to protect Ontario's inactive cemeteries.

In my own community, we have a long history in having a community champion an inactive cemetery. I have some correspondence with me today from Ed Janiszewski, who is writing to me on behalf of the Lakeshore Asylum Cemetery Project, which is a cemetery at the corner of Horner and Evans in my community. It is the cemetery where those individuals who passed away who were living at the Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital were buried for many, many years. I had, myself, an opportunity to attend that cemetery last May and work with a group in the community who were revitalizing, cleaning the graves and planting flowers to make sure that that cemetery would not be forgotten.

It's a cemetery that was the subject of some controversy a number of years ago, as there were concerns that the land would be sold—had been sold—and would be turned into something else. I can certainly tell you that I received a lot of comment from my community and was very pleased when it was not the case anymore that that cemetery was at risk. So I'm very pleased to know that individuals who watch the protection of our cemeteries across the province are giving their wholehearted support to Mr. Brownell, the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, including the Ontario Genealogical Society, whose president wrote to me in support of this bill. As I said, folks from my own community have been supportive.

I think it is so important to understand what we are talking about here today—simply to look at the preamble of Bill 149: "Ontario's cemeteries are unique repositories of human history and the resting places of human remains and associated artifacts like grave markers, tombstones and monuments. They are important elements of our collective heritage, a priceless authentic historical record of the past and witnesses to the continuity of life in Ontario. Many of Ontario's cemeteries also contain significant ecological features invaluable to the natural heritage of Ontario."

I stand wholeheartedly in support of my colleague for moving forward in their protection and look very much toward seeing passage of this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jim Brownell: First, I'd like to thank all those who spoke in support of this bill: the members from Kitchener–Waterloo, Trinity–Spadina, Peterborough, Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, Eglinton–Lawrence and Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

It's wonderful to be in the House this afternoon and see support on this from all sides of the Legislature, and to have our good friends from the two societies—the Ontario Historical Society and the Ontario Genealogical Society—who have worked so hard to protect what we have, and protect the sanctity and cemeteries out there.

But these fights should not have to go on any longer. These historical and genealogical groups should be researching and documenting and preserving; that's what they do best. I just want to thank them for their work and their support.

I would like to wrap up this afternoon—somebody passed along this poem; its author is unknown, and it's certainly not from my pen. It reads as follows:

Dear Ancestor
Your tombstone stands among the rest;
Neglected and alone.
The name and date are chiselled out
On polished, marbled stone.
It reaches out to all who care
It is too late to mourn.
You did not know that I exist
You died and I was born.
Yet each of us are cells of you
In flesh, in blood, in bone.
Our blood contracts and beats a pulse
Entirely not our own.
Dear Ancestor, the place you filled
One hundred years ago
Spreads out among the ones you left
Who would have loved you so.
I wonder if you lived and loved,
I wonder if you knew
That someday I would find this spot,
And come to visit you.

I hope that we in the province of Ontario can continue to visit those sites in their original locations and stop this fighting, to preserve the sanctity of these sacred places in our province.

GREENBELT DAY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE JOUR DE LA CEINTURE DE VERDURE

Mr. Dickson moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 153, An Act to proclaim Greenbelt Day / Projet de loi 153, Loi proclamant le Jour de la ceinture de verdure.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 98, Mr. Dickson, you have up to 12 minutes.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, honourable members of the Legislature, ladies and gentlemen. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak in favour of having February 28 designated as a permanent basis for Ontario Greenbelt Day.

My interest in matters of the environment is not recent. From 1985 to 2000, I had the pleasure of chairing the Ajax waterfront committee as its longest-serving chair. We have maintained it in green, passive parkland, the best waterfront between Toronto and Kingston. It is not commercial. It is full of walkways, bikeways, gardens, picnic areas and sitting areas.

Twenty-three years ago, I was privileged to start Ajax Environmental Affairs Week, and to this day remain active with all of its volunteers. Some 22 years ago, I had the pleasure, with Sherry Brown, president of ACE, Ajax Citizens for the Environment, of commencing a waste reduction week in Ajax.

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These date-specific events bring out people in Ajax—Pickering to clean up waste, plant trees and greenery, repair environmental damage, and participate in workshops and seminars, compost giveaways, naturalization and much more, with the good people from TRCA, which of course is the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, and CLOCA, which is the Central Lake Ontario Conservation Authority, with its headquarters in Oshawa, in Durham region.

This also fosters intense community awareness of the need to preserve and conserve our environment. This kind of focus also helps to create media awareness in our home, the town of Ajax, various villages and the city of Pickering. But we still need to promote the environment more.

This increased awareness in turn ensures that more of our citizens understand the environmental actions that can alter and shape behaviour in our society. By having a specific focus on the environment at a specific time, we are able to involve more people at a deeper participatory level in issues of the environment and conservation. This kind of awareness can and will change how people behave in terms of the environment.

Four years ago, in February 2005, the government of Ontario, under the Minister of Municipal Affairs, John Gerretsen, and our Premier, Dalton McGuinty, established Ontario's greenbelt with the agreement of all political parties in the Legislature. I want to take a moment and commend the opposition parties for their generous support then, and ask for their strong and ongoing full support on this measure. By jointly recognizing the importance of this day in terms of environmental legislation and conservation issues, we will be able to focus public opinion and support on environmental cleanup, growth and conservation.

The greenbelt deserves recognition with its own special day, not only for the many benefits we receive from its existence, but the greenbelt also protects 1.8 million acres of environmentally sensitive and agricultural lands in the Golden Horseshoe area. Some of Ontario's most valuable watersheds, wetlands and forests have been preserved by the greenbelt. It's great to have the Minister of Natural Resources here today to add her support to this.

My own region of Durham has over 500,000 acres of protected greenbelt, preserving crucial farmland, watersheds and wetlands, such as the Rouge River, Duffins Creek, Carruthers Creek, Lynde Creek, Lynde Shores, Oshawa Creek, Bowmanville/Soper Creek, Wilmot Creek, Black Creek, Harmony Creek and Farewell Creek.

The more than 7,000 farms in the greenbelt provide Ontarians with locally grown and raised food. Locally produced foods have a shorter distance to market. They thus reduce transportation costs and air pollution problems, including smog and greenhouse gases. Direct economic benefits, as well, flow from the greenbelt. Many notable tourism and recreation and culture events come from this.

In Durham region it boosts, and in some cases drives, the initiatives of food, hospitality and tourism industries, most notably the Durham Farm Fresh project, a great project chaired by one of Durham's mayors, Mayor Marilyn Pearce of Scugog. It is a region-sponsored project. I have represented both the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Tourism on these events' kickoffs.

Moreover, estimates have shown the greenbelt provides essential ecological services or benefits based on \$2.6 billion for eight million residents across the Golden Horseshoe. These benefits and services help to support the growth of the green economies for Durham region and Ontario communities. At the same time, our environment is protected, along with the 66 endangered species that inhabit the greenbelt. The Ontario government has recently recognized again the importance of the greenbelt by establishing the I Love the Greenbelt awards that honour those people from all walks of life who have made the greenbelt such a success.

On February 26, our Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Jim Watson, paid a visit to St. Patrick Catholic School in Ajax. He promoted the awards for the greenbelt contest, which allows the students to help design the new awards as part of this initiative. He was

warmly received by all of the classes and the principal and teachers.

It would be most fitting for us as legislators to honour the greenbelt idea itself with a special day. As my community in Durham region and others like it in Ontario continue to experience such rapid growth as we have seen in the last few years, we realize more and more how important it is to build awareness of our citizens and appreciation for land protected from excessive overdevelopment. Our greenbelt has been praised across the world as a forward-thinking initiative that protects needed green space around our largest urban centre.

A recently released study pointed out that the zone of protected land around Toronto was one of the largest in the world and was superior to those in Europe and other parts of North America. The David Suzuki group is a great advocate of what we have accomplished as a province so far. That study, compiled by the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy called our greenbelt "the most successful and the most useful greenbelt in the world." I remember my past regional chair, a very popular gentleman, a farmer by the name of Gary Herrema, in the late 1980s and early 1990s when I was on regional council, who foresaw this need and made us all aware of it over two decades ago. As a farmer, he understands the environment and conservation.

Greenbelt Day will be an opportunity for schools, youth groups, seniors, municipalities and environmental groups to come together and promote conservation. We will have a chance to heighten the awareness of how we're all linked together in communities in our province by the ever-increasing need to protect our natural heritage for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren. We need to remember and recognize that the greenbelt is a legacy for our young people and future generations. We are only stewards of the land. We have a distinct obligation to honour the terms of this stewardship by passing on our land in such a way as may be enjoyed by the generations coming after us.

Creating a day to celebrate the greenbelt will ensure Ontario's greenbelts are respected, protected and enjoyed by future generations. I ask you for your continued all-party support in moving this bill forward. Let us not lose this wonderful opportunity that we have as unified legislators to bring Ontario together in our communities to celebrate this milestone and by so doing, protect our environment and enhance our conservation efforts for all of us for all time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The greenbelt area is a wonderful concept, a great concept, because I think that what planners fear and what the people of Ontario fear is the expansion that takes place in the growth of population and industry as that happens across Ontario, particularly in the Toronto area. As you fly into Pearson airport, you see rooftops for almost as far as your eye can see, and I think people are worried that those rooftops may just continue to grow and expand. Certainly the next stage

might be going west; they might stop somewhere west of Cambridge. But then what would happen? Would they just continue after that?

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The concept of a greenbelt is a good concept. I'd point out that the Greenbelt Protection Act was introduced in December 2003 and received royal assent in June 2004. Some eight months later, the Greenbelt Act was introduced, in October 2004, and some four months later, in February 2005, it received royal assent. The first bill, of course, created a greenbelt study area and the second bill, the latter bill, provided for the establishment of the greenbelt. Of course what happened during that intervening eight months is that they studied this massive area, a million and a half acres, 700,000 hectares. They studied this massive area as to where this greenbelt should go.

I would respectfully suggest that that study was insignificant and far less than it should have been. We can make comparisons because we've done this kind of thing in the past in Ontario. We can make comparisons with the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act, which was introduced in 1984. In the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act there was a 10-year period where the lines as to what would be protected, how it would be protected and what that protection would look like took place. Over that 10-year period of debate, there developed a concept that there was an area along the scarp, along the cliff of the Niagara Escarpment, which was extremely sensitive to development. The most sensitive area that had to be protected was called the "natural area." Then, set back from that area, there was another band on each side of it called the "protected area," which extended from a few hundred yards to a mile or more in various parts along the escarpment. As these concepts developed over this 10 years, lines began to be drawn on the map as to what was sensitive and what was not, what could be protected and what did not need to be protected. There was then a further protected area outside the first two designations that was called "agricultural" or "rural." Those areas had some constraints as to what could be done on them as well.

That conversation took place over 10 years between the people of Ontario and the planning committee. It also took place between the people whose property was going to be affected and the planning committee. Although that was never a smooth process, it was a process that I think gave maximum opportunity for those who were going to be affected by this act to have their input. By and large, it went fairly well over the course of that act. It's had some rocky roads and some people have been upset with it, some people have been very happy with it, but I think it has had the desired effect overall: protecting a very sensitive part and a very beautiful part of Ontario. A good portion of my riding, of course, is under the protection of the Niagara Escarpment act.

In comparing that to how the greenbelt worked, they had eight months of study. The study was not public; the study was internal. They drew lines on the map as to

where the greenbelt would go to protect sensitive environmental areas. Lo and behold, a lot of these lines that came out to define the greenbelt were straight. They run straight down a road. They were made with a ruler across a map. We all know that natural areas, areas that are sensitive, areas that need protection, don't run in straight lines. So I say to you that the method of developing the way this greenbelt looks was seriously flawed and that some effort should be made by this government to open up that Greenbelt Act and to reconsider where those lines should go. Some of them in the riding of Halton, and particularly in the riding of Wellington-Halton Hills, should be expanded, very definitely. There are some very sensitive, very beautiful areas that are left outside those lines. Some of those lines should be contracted. Some of those lines are "me too" property that doesn't have any significant value.

Another comparison to the Greenbelt Act would be Ontario's Living Legacy, which I was personally involved with. Ontario's Living Legacy was the largest protection of land in Ontario's history. It almost doubled the number of acres that were placed under protection in Ontario. In Ontario we have about nine million acres of agricultural land. As you drive from a little west of Toronto to Windsor along the 401, you drive through a tremendous number of acres of agricultural land. If you drive from Fort Erie to Owen Sound, you will see a tremendous number of agricultural acres. If you add all of those acres together, and you add in the acres that are north and west and east of Toronto, you will come up with about nine and a half million acres of agricultural land in Ontario. Ontario's Living Legacy program protected about that number of acres in Ontario from further development or further desecration. That was the largest increase in protected property in Ontario's history, in Canada's history, and in fact it was the largest protected program ever attempted in the world. That was Ontario's Living Legacy. It was a wonderful program.

I was responsible for bringing the Great Lakes Heritage Coast project into fruition under that program. It was an interesting process we went through. The Great Lakes Heritage Coast basically stretched from Port Severn along the coast of Georgian Bay, up across the North Channel, including the islands in the North Channel—Manitoulin Island and St. Joseph's Island, which was mentioned in debate here a couple of days ago as being one of the most beautiful islands in the Great Lakes, and I can concur that it is. It is an absolutely amazing island, including an 1812 fort on the south end of that island which was put there to protect against an American invasion during the War of 1812. The only thing that's left of it is the foundations now, but it's still an integral part of our history and an integral part of St. Joseph's Island, which is in Mike's riding. It is a beautiful part of Ontario; I recommend you go and see it. Not too many of you, because there's a lot of wilderness there and part of its charm is its remoteness. So if too many of you go, it will lose that remoteness, that charm that it has. So only a few of you go at a time anyway. Don't everybody go up there together. It's a wonderful part of Ontario.

The Great Lakes Heritage Coast continues on along the North Shore of Lake Superior all the way to the American border. And in the discussions that took place, first we went out and discussed with each community along the way what their concept of a Great Lakes Heritage Coast was. What did they think this might be? How did they feel about it? Was it a good thing or a bad thing? They then gave us playback on that. About six months later, we went back out along the coast to many of the same communities again and presented them with a plan: "This is what we're thinking. Is this what you told us? Is this what we heard from you? Did we get it right? Is this what you want to have happen in your town, in your part of the Great Lakes Heritage Coast." This isn't a plan that was going to be planned in Toronto by the bureaucrats or the elected representatives; this was a plan that was going to be developed by the people who live, work and play along this wonderful piece of Ontario's real estate.

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After that, we tuned up the plan as to what they told us, from the playback that we got from that second round of consultations. We came up with a third round of consultations, which was going to be the plan. These were going to be the lines, this was going to be what was allowed to happen in this area and what was allowed to happen in that area. We went back out again for a third round of consultations, saying, "This is what we propose to do. What is your reaction? Are you in favour of this or are you against it?" There were three separate consultations over a two-and-a-half-year period that took place in order to make sure that the people this plan was being imposed upon were supportive and worked with it.

That did not happen with the greenbelt. The greenbelt was imposed after eight months of study. I suppose there was study, because it wasn't public. No one was involved in that study, so I don't know if the study actually took place. But after only eight months of a secret study, the greenbelt was imposed. So although the concept is good, and I can support the concept of the greenbelt, the implementation was very bad.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the opportunity to speak today to the inauguration of Greenbelt Day, a concept that I support. I think it's important to bring attention to the value of the greenbelt here in southern Ontario. It really is very, very easy, all too easy for us to forget about the value of the environment that we depend on, take it for granted, just simply assume it's always going to be there.

Right now at this time when many Ontarians are struggling to make ends meet—and everyone in this chamber is well aware of that, not just from newspaper reports but, I'm sure, from personal stories, interactions with neighbours and friends, constituents; you know people who have lost their savings as seniors, farmers who are facing a tough time. All are absorbed with the reality that they're trying to deal with, and it can be very difficult for

them to think about what some of us may consider as longer-term considerations. Longer-term issues may even, to some of them, look like a luxury.

But we need to understand that the greenbelt is important and that neither the Greenbelt Act of 2004 nor the resulting greenbelt plan of 2005 have fully succeeded in protecting this important piece of land. That task needs to be completed, and this act will contribute to that completion.

According to the greenbelt plan, the purpose of the greenbelt is to protect against loss of agricultural land, both to preserve our food security and also to protect against sprawl. It's meant to protect natural heritage. It's meant to protect water resources to ensure ecological and human health. We in this part of Ontario all depend on the greenbelt and the water that flows through it for recreation, ultimately for drinking water, because it flows into Lake Ontario; we depend on it to keep nature alive and functioning in this part of Ontario.

Given that, what do we see when we look at the greenbelt? We see 150,000 acres of land in the greenbelt still open to future development, enough for the continuation of urban sprawl for decades. That, for us, is a substantial threat because as we sprawl, we increase the air pollution that we all have to deal with. As we sprawl, we build a city and an urban form that's very difficult to serve with urban transit, and we build an urban form that demands continued exploitation of and consumption of oil and other fossil fuel resources. We see leapfrogging over the greenbelt into places like the Lake Simcoe area. We see the continued failure to protect areas on the outskirts of Hamilton, Waterloo, areas that are very vulnerable to urban sprawl. Clearly, everyone in this House knows there will be a price to pay—no, not that there will be; certainly there will be, but there already is today a price to pay for sprawl, and one that continues to mount not only in congestion and the inconvenience that comes from that but a price to be paid in terms of the stability of our cities in the long run.

We see exemptions to the greenbelt granted to numerous major developments. In fact, as I understand it, the government doesn't even know how many exemptions have been granted because they had some level of approval before this act took effect. That is of consequence. When I drive along the 401 and see those big signs saying, "Entering the greenbelt," and see the land around covered in suburban subdivisions, I have to ask myself, was this sign put here out of a sense of irony, was it put here out of a sense of humour, or does it in fact mark an area that was thought to be greenbelt at one point but is now simply seen as an area for more development?

One development that should be brought to people's attention is the West Hill development in Aurora, which is poised to suck away hundreds of thousands of litres of water a day from the moraine—not a good use of that land, but also not a good indicator of the health of the greenbelt itself.

We see the imposition of inefficient and polluting gas-fired power plants, such as the one in King township, on

greenbelt land where most residents and even local councils don't want them. Residents there made a very good argument. They pointed out that this plant was far in excess of any need for power in that region, that this was a regional power plant being imposed on them, and that there were huge opportunities for investing alternatively in renewable energy generation that would be compatible with the greenbelt. Their objections were brushed aside.

We see an increasing number of golf courses on or at the edges of the greenbelt drawing huge amounts of groundwater. These golf courses are centres for use of pesticides, unfortunately. The pesticides act that we so recently debated in this Legislature didn't include an amendment that would have required substantial reduction of pesticides on golf courses. Those golf courses that are there continue to be a centre of toxins that will get into the water supply. The reality, according to a report by Earthroots and Ecojustice from last year, is that the province has not even studied the cumulative impact on the Oak Ridges moraine of golf courses and other water users. So I have to ask, if you haven't studied the cumulative impact, how can you actually do realistic water planning? How can you know that you will have sufficient water at a price that is affordable and bearable in the decades to come? The moraine provides the headwaters for some 65 streams flowing into Lake Simcoe, Lake Scugog and Lake Ontario and is the source of much of the region's drinking water.

In New York City, they have an area north of the city that they have protected and preserved because they realized that protecting, preserving and conserving these headwaters was far more important and far more cost-effective for the city's water supply than any other engineered solution that could be presented. We do not seem to have approached it as vigorously as that jurisdiction. The government itself lets dozens of golf course operators draw billions of litres of water a day away from the crucial resource with little or no oversight. I have to ask, why would you not stand up and protect those water resources that are crucial for the well-being of the millions of people who live in the GTA?

We see continued permission given to mining pits and quarries allowed on the vast majority of the greenbelt without any long-term conservation strategy for aggregates such as stone, sand, gravel and shale. When we do demolition in the GTA, there is a ready source of aggregates in old concrete, in aggregates that were used in the past that could be recycled now rather than digging up the greenbelt.

We see the continued expansion of highways and the building of new highways both within and just outside of the greenbelt, highways that have a huge detrimental ecological impact and perpetuate low-density, car-dependent urban sprawl. Again, this government's initiative in the greenbelt is being undermined by its own failure to actually follow through and make sure that the greenbelt is protected, to deliver—what would be best?—the long-term protection that the people of this province expect.

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We see inadequate support and compensation to farmers for services provided in protecting the land. If you talk to farmers, they have great interest in protecting land, not a great interest in going bankrupt. Investing in them and helping them protect land serves us all.

This government could take significant action to strengthen and expand the protection of the greenbelt land. It could put a moratorium on new golf courses, new highways, new polluting gas power plants and new aggregate extraction in the greenbelt. Those are all options open to it.

I'm glad this bill is here before us today because every year on Greenbelt Day we will be able to remind the government that its protection of the greenbelt is inadequate; that the task of building a greenbelt that will protect us against urban sprawl, deal with our water resources and deal with our agricultural land uses is an incomplete task—in fact, a task that is not getting the support it deserves from the parents of this very initiative.

This government could significantly expand support for stewardship and other incentive programs that recognize and reward farmers' efforts to conserve soil, water, air and the biodiversity of the greenbelt.

The government could move ahead much more quickly with expanding its alternative land use services program, which has been in pilot mode for too long. After a while you have to ask when something is no longer worthy of the term "pilot" and more worthy of the term "diversion." The government could change that. It could say, "Okay, we've piloted this alternative land use services program. We've learned what's good about it, what's weak about it and we can roll ahead."

The government could significantly expand the greenbelt itself to protect new areas facing significant development pressures, as recently called for by the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance. Last month, the alliance stated there has been little progress on expanding the greenbelt since the government released draft expansion criteria last August—August. It's March, getting into April. It's been a while. There's an opportunity there to move forward. Time is passing quickly. Development pressures, even in a recession, are very much there, and the government needs to take steps to resist those.

The alliance called for the expansion of the greenbelt to protect areas facing specific threats: Kitchener-Waterloo, Guelph, Brantford, Simcoe county, Port Hope, the upper watershed areas, the Golden Horseshoe rivers and others.

In summary, although putting forward the idea of a greenbelt—the initial legislative adoption was useful; the lack of ongoing protection of that child of the Legislature is highly problematic. It means that those ecosystems that we depend on aren't getting the protection they need. The Greenbelt Act hasn't succeeded in stemming urban sprawl. It sort of moved it around. It left massive amounts out of the greenbelt and unprotected.

I look forward to celebrating this day in the future and raising these issues year after year.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak this Thursday afternoon, shortly after 3 o'clock.

First, I want to thank the member from the great riding—or the green riding, let's say—of Ajax-Pickering for allowing me to speak on his bill this afternoon.

Four years ago, our government made a decision to protect—and a great decision—1.8 million acres of environmentally sensitive and agricultural lands, of which a large portion is in my riding of Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Fort Erie.

There are over 7,000 farms in the greenbelt, farms that provide Ontarians with delicious and healthy food that is grown and raised locally. In my opinion, farming and the greenbelt is about the land and the people who preserve it—our farmers. Farmers like the Hernders, the Kirkbys, the Ducs, the Neumanns and the Troupes—all from my riding.

Research shows that the greenbelt contributes \$2.6 billion to our local economy each year; \$1 billion of that happens to be in the very fertile 60,000 acres in one third of my riding, Niagara-on-the-Lake. Niagara's 2.1 million tender-fruit trees produce about 800,000 baskets of fruit that would stretch along the QEW from Kingston to Niagara Falls. Fifteen thousand acres are devoted to the production of some of the world's finest—finest—VQA wines; 80% of Canada's total wine production. My riding alone is responsible for nearly 75% of that production. I'll tell you, that is a lot of great wine in Canada. I drink some of it as well, and I'm sure all the members of the House do. VQA wine, remember that. So the greenbelt is certainly worth saving, and it's certainly worth celebrating.

Let me tell you about what our government is doing to protect this wonderful, natural, all-green resource. We have invested \$25 million to help create the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, under the leadership of Don Ziraldo. This centre, working closely with Guelph and Brock universities, will be a model for horticulture research and have the capacity to serve as a major contributor to Ontario's horticulture industry, including the grape-growing sector. We've provided over \$33 million since 2003 in support to the Ontario apple, tender fruit and grape growers. We secured \$22.3 million in federal funding from stock removal and strategic planting projects when plum pox hit the tree-fruit industry. We moved quickly to help the grape vineyards transition from grape juice to wine juice. In March 2006, we provided \$150,000 to Brock University to advance innovation and research relative to the region's unique agricultural resources, including biotechnology, biomedical and information technology research. As part of our buy-Ontario strategy, we recently announced the \$12-million, four-year Ontario market investment fund, which includes support for local food networks and other industry efforts in promoting local foods. We provided nearly \$10 million to promote VQA wines and another \$4 million this year to help with the grape surpluses.

In summary, the year 2009 marks the fourth anniversary of the establishment of Ontario's greenbelt. This greenbelt protects 1.8 million acres in the Golden Horseshoe, preserving critical farmlands, providing tourism, recreation and health benefits and supporting local green economies that benefit the environment. The greenbelt has been praised throughout the world as forward-thinking. It is estimated that the greenbelt is valued at \$2.6 billion in ecological services and benefits. Leading environmental organizations have lauded the establishment of the greenbelt for the economic benefit and ecological protection it provides. Proclaiming February 28 in each year as Greenbelt Day certainly provides Ontarians with an opportunity to celebrate this milestone.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm really pleased to rise today to support Bill 153, An Act to proclaim Greenbelt Day, brought forward by my colleague from Ajax-Pickering. Celebrating a particular day to honour the greenbelt is, I think, a real opportunity to engage communities and to sensitize individuals to the issues of environmental sustainability and conservation right at the local level.

The majority of the landmass of my riding of Oak Ridges-Markham is in fact in the greenbelt. There are two particular features that are part of this greenbelt: the Oak Ridges moraine and Rouge Park. They are both tremendously important to the residents of my riding.

First of all, the Oak Ridges moraine, as has already been described, is an environmentally sensitive area. It's an irregular ridge of sandy hills, and it acts as a recharge area for groundwater when rainwater percolates through these generally porous soils to the aquifer below. It provides drinking water for thousands and thousands through individual and municipal wells.

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Most important, as our colleague from Beaches-East York has mentioned, it is the largest concentration of headwater streams in the GTA, flowing into, in my area, both Lake Ontario and Lake Simcoe, the source of drinking water for millions. So maintaining the purity of these waters at the source is extremely important.

It's also a very beautiful area. I had the opportunity to go up in a hot air balloon a number of years ago and float over the Oak Ridges moraine. And although you do see the Kettle Lakes from the roads going through the moraine, when you see it from the air, it is absolutely spectacular. The number of little lakes, wetlands, is extraordinarily beautiful. It's also home to many endangered species. There are waterfowl in abundance. So the aesthetic pleasure of having this on our doorstep is just a tremendous asset.

I'd also like to mention the Rouge Park, started in Scarborough in 1994 by a group of environmental activists. Since 2004, our government has made a concerted effort to expand the park north of Steeles into my riding, so that it now covers an amazing 47 square kilometres.

In 2006, a new natural area was dedicated to long-time environmentalist and journalist Bob Hunter. In fact, the

member for Ajax-Pickering and I were planting trees there just last year. In 2007, the Ontario government added an additional 600 hectares in east Markham, in my riding.

There is actually a special section on the Rouge Park that was included in the greenbelt plan. It recognized the park's management and implementation plans as key planning documents, as well as the park's key role in protecting a major biodiversity reservoir for the Toronto area.

I'm extremely fortunate to have so much of the greenbelt in my riding. There's a very large network of hiking trails throughout. Last fall, I attended the opening of the link between the Bruce Trail and the Oak Ridges Trail, creating Canada's longest marked footpath.

I look forward to celebrating Greenbelt Day in my riding of Oak Ridges.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: It is indeed a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak for a few minutes this afternoon in support of Bill 153, An Act to proclaim Greenbelt Day, in support of my good friend the member from Ajax-Pickering.

Since his time here, I've gotten to know the member from Ajax-Pickering very well. His wife, Donna, and his family have been leaders during his entire municipal career in Ajax, in promoting environmentalism and establishing a number of days, a number of activities, in the town of Ajax to support positive environmental stewardship. Indeed, I wasn't surprised when the member brought forward this act, after four years of implementation, to celebrate Greenbelt Day.

The greenbelt of Ontario provides protection for in excess of 1.8 million acres. This is an extension of a long history in the province of Ontario of protecting areas. I think of a former Premier, William Davis, of course, who brought forward the Niagara Escarpment act to protect, as the member from Halton said very clearly today, land mass from the town of Halton right down to the very tip of Niagara Falls. Out of that activity came the establishment of the Niagara Escarpment Commission to provide a framework to make sure that the goals articulated in the Niagara Escarpment act were preserved, through the years and years of work by the Niagara Escarpment Commission.

The greenbelt does come east, does touch my riding, so to speak, in the municipality of Cavan-Monaghan. In fact, Cavan-Monaghan is in the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, but we do share it.

We understand that the Oak Ridges moraine, which was incorporated by the previous government, became part of our greenbelt along with the Niagara Escarpment. It is an area that has extensive springs and serves as the recharge area for groundwater in that area, something that's very much depended on. The communities in that area—the farm community and others—depend on the protection that is offered in the Oak Ridges moraine to provide a quality source of drinking water.

This has been supported over the last number of years by David Suzuki, who certainly applauded the Ontario

government in moving forward in such a decisive direction to protect this area.

I think we've all been told that they don't make land anymore. If we don't bring in measures to protect land for future generations, it will be gobbled up by the development industry. I know the member for St. Catharines is quoted many times as saying that if they hadn't brought in the Niagara Escarpment Commission, "every inch of ground from Mississauga to Niagara Falls would have been paved over by developers."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Ajax-Pickering, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I certainly appreciate everyone who rose today.

I understand the good member from Halton's comments on the straight lines as part of the boundaries, and certainly that's one item that's going to be reviewed in the five-and-a-half-year time frame when that comes forward. He talked about the protected areas on the escarpment—the Cambridge area—and what a good concept the green plan is. He gave us a history of the evolution of the greenbelt over 10 years, and I do appreciate that.

My neighbour, the minister here—sorry, the past minister, probably—from Toronto—Danforth certainly cites the value of the environment. We need an understanding of what we have yet to do to fully secure the land. We need to protect this against sprawl for agriculture and of course for drinking water. He had a concern about the Westhill development in Aurora. Things like that are concerns of us all.

My good friend from Niagara Falls is the only person here with a green Harley. He spoke green every time he could. He mentioned grapes, fruits, wines, Niagara-on-the-Lake and, of course, the 1.8 million acres preserved and what a great establishment it was.

My good seatmate the wonderful doctor—I can't mention the doctor's name, but she's from the Oak Ridges—Markham riding—talked about the Oak Ridges moraine, the kettle lakes, the endangered species, Rouge Park, which is now 47 square kilometres, and of course our joint venture where I followed her lead at the Bob Hunter park tree-planting exercises.

My good friend from Peterborough's country is part of my country, because I go through it most weekends to get to the cottage. I realize that the benefit of this greenbelt touches not only Peterborough, but of course the new riding of Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, which will receive representation soon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. We have lots of time today, but yours has run out.

TRUTH ABOUT CALEDONIA ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 CONCERNANT LA VÉRITÉ SUR CALEDONIA

Mr. Barrett moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 146, An Act to provide for a public inquiry to determine the truth about the administration of justice, law enforcement and the ownership of land within the former Haldimand Tract and nearby areas / *Projet de loi 146, Loi prévoyant une enquête publique pour établir la vérité sur l'administration de la justice, l'exécution de la loi et la propriété de biens-fonds dans les limites de l'ancien terrain de Haldimand et dans les zones environnantes.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 98, Mr. Barrett, you have up to 12 minutes.

Mr. Toby Barrett: It's been three years of native land disputes in the Haldimand-Brant area that have been marked, as many will know, by violence, injury, fear and intimidation. They've shut down development and drained our area economy. I stand before those assembled today asking for a public inquiry. We do wish to bring clarity, answers and truth to those who have been forced to suffer through the economic, fiscal and emotional impact over the past three years.

Last night, I addressed the Brantford-area home builders on native land disputes and talked about this call for an inquiry. When I finished, the first question from the audience was, "Will the bill pass?" I responded, "Not a hope in hell." The Premier has already stated his distaste for such an endeavour. In fact, it was probably four hours before I had a chance to even introduce Bill 146 to legislators. Mr. McGuinty announced he would stop such an inquiry from going forward.

1540

Again, all before you, as elected members—none of you had a chance to see the proposed legislation. Clearly, our Premier has jeopardized this process. I remind the Premier this is private members' hour: It's part of our time-honoured democratic process. This is our hour.

In the words of Alfred Tennyson, today I feel I'm perhaps part of the charge of the light brigade. As many will know, that was the ill-fated brigade that stormed on to a predetermined defeat. They fought on, despite the tragic destiny that awaited. So I'll saddle up and forward this call for an inquiry. I do ask all present to look into your hearts on behalf of people in Brantford, Caledonia and the area if you feel this is an intolerable situation. Rest assured that I will not be calling for a recorded vote. This a secret ballot. Look well to your ballot.

I do remind members that following the light brigade, Tennyson informs us in his poem, there was the charge of the heavy brigade, and I look forward to the spring. There will be a large number of people from Caledonia descending on Queen's Park. There's a petition out there right now; there are 7,000 signatures calling for a police inquiry with respect to Caledonia.

Despite the Premier's interference in our democratic process this afternoon, I wish to go forward on some of the reasoning behind 146, the short title, Truth about Caledonia Act. In crafting the legislation, I attempted to build on previous efforts to get to the truth with respect to this ongoing series of land disputes and the impact on

people, on their lives and on their livelihoods as well. The protesters arrived at the Douglas Creek Estates subdivision on February 28, 2006. I walked in behind the barricades the next day, or maybe two days later. We've watched a series of events unfold since then. It has changed people's lives. It has obviously changed the area economy. And it has changed, regrettably, the age-old relationships between native and non-native people in our area. April 20, we witnessed the botched OPP raid, followed by the road closures, the tire burnings, the fistfights, the electricity switching station that was torched and, later on, the brutal beating of the older son, Gualtieri, and the assault on a Channel 11 cameraman. We've seen, as a result, a three-year freeze on any building activity. I travel Haldimand county. You don't hear hammers; you do not hear skill saws.

It continues just this week. We hear of a leaked memo in which the provincial government put \$100,000 on the table at a meeting in Brantford; \$100,000 allocated to the Haudenosaunee Six Nations. The agreement called for the city of Brantford to request the court to adjourn for three months on this interlocutory injunction motion against the Haudenosaunee Development Institute. That's the infamous HDI group that is involved in extortion from builders and developers. I really am not in favour of paying or even negotiating with people who are engaged in illegal activity. I feel that is an affront, really, to the very concepts of what this great province was built on.

There's also the issue of the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I raised the question this week, instructing Haldimand county that he would approve their official plan if, and only if, they remove two properties from the urban boundary, properties that the county had included back in 2006. One property is at Argyle Street and 6th Line, and it's adjacent to the Douglas Creek Estates subdivision that is presently occupied by militants. In spite of this province saying it's a federal issue, it seems to feel it appropriate to wade in and make decisions on whether or not there's going to be some kind of a Native objection or militant action.

A few examples of why I would like to have an inquiry to get down to what's been going on: There's so much talk of the secret negotiations, secret deals that are being made. There are so many mixed messages and, really, false information, while essentially we see a situation where this province is selling the farm to those who have brought a gun to our heads, all without the input and knowledge of those who will be most affected. So it really is time to shed some light on the backroom dealings and the unreported agreements that this government is attempting to hide.

To that end, the bill calls for an inquiry into the administration of justice, law enforcement and the ownership of land within the former Haldimand tract and nearby areas. The preamble to this legislation cites that allegations have been raised with respect to political influence in the court's administration of justice and in the enforcement of the law by police. Area residents also want to determine the truth with respect to the ownership of the various lands in dispute.

Now, in regard to allegations of political influence and the court's administration of justice, I make reference to a very common expression now, "catch-and-release justice." I make mention of the \$100,000 that was put on the table recently to block a court injunction motion against the Haudenosaunee Development Institute. I think of Justice Marshall's injunction three years ago to clear Douglas Creek Estates of the occupiers. The province stepped in and blocked that, actually to the point of buying that land, and that injunction was never enforced. Those occupiers are here three years later.

Allegations of political influence in the enforcement of the law by the police: I think of that ongoing occupation of the subdivision. I was there on the second or third day. I did not witness anybody asking those people to leave. I walked back in there at least 18 times; no one asked them to leave. The carpenters had to leave. I think of a photograph I distributed to members here of a group of people, quite visible, throwing a van from a Haldimand county bridge onto provincial Highway 6. Again, no charges were laid. I am told of residents being asked if it's a Native issue when they dial 911 and then a different police force shows up, depending on their answer. Hence, this call for a police inquiry and this petition that will be arriving here in May.

Land ownership rights in the province of Ontario: I'm thinking of the eviction notices a number of people have received. My wife pulled an eviction notice out of our mailbox at our farm. To this day, I fully believe I do own my land. It's not owned by anybody else. I attended what's called a TRUE meeting in Brantford. Representatives of a new group, the Men's Fire, explained to residents in Brantford, "It's okay. You can live in your house. You just don't own your land any more."

I've mentioned the HDI extortion of the building trades. There are certain revelations. The small print within title insurance is very, very unnerving, and this is something I hope to be raising in the future.

A number of initiatives: A few years ago, there was an opposition day motion here calling for an inquiry, dozens of questions in the House and on committees like the estimates committee. I put forward what I labelled the Haldimand proclamation. I had petitions calling for public hearings. I drafted a resolution to restore policing to Sixth Line—that's a Haldimand county road without OPP protection; no police protection at the subdivision, at DCE—and a call to restore Douglas Creek Estates to its original use as a subdivision. In the future, there will be people arriving, calling for the police inquiry.

1550

I've received lots of input. I've got about 430 people on an e-mail list who have given me some advice and comments. I've worked with four or five lawyers on this. All we ask for are some answers. We know the value of inquiries like the Walkerton inquiry and the Ipperwash inquiry. It allows us to find out what happened and to look back. It allows us to look forward and to propose policy reform, all the while conducted in public view with the full participation of the public.

I leave this for those present. You do have a vote this afternoon, and I just ask you to make a decision on your own.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: It is a privilege to have the opportunity to get a few words on the record this afternoon.

I want to preface my remarks by saying that I am the parliamentary assistant for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs in the province of Ontario. At the request of the then minister, Michael Bryant, on Family Day in February 2008 I made a visit to Caledonia. On that particular day, I spent some time visiting the Six Nations of the Mohawk. I visited Douglas Creek Estates. I took a look at the situation there. One of the things that I think always gives you a perspective on how things are happening and unfolding in the community—I went to McDonald's in Caledonia and I sat down and had lunch with a number of the local residents to have a positive dialogue on the challenges they're facing.

Indeed, I think we did have a public inquiry a number of years ago. We had the inquiry into the situation surrounding Ipperwash and the tragic death of Dudley George. Under that inquiry, there came a series of recommendations that provide a way forward on how to handle what is certainly a very, very challenging situation for the residents who reside in that area. But I do think it does provide a framework. It provides us with a series of recommendations. It goes without saying that the federal government indeed has a very large role to play in trying to resolve a number of these land issues, not only in the province of Ontario but indeed throughout Canada.

We have moved forward in a couple of areas. Just recently, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, the Honourable Brad Duguid, appointed Canada's pre-eminent negotiator, Mr. Tom Malloy, to act as Ontario's representative at the negotiation table. I know that all of us wish Mr. Malloy Godspeed in helping to resolve some of these very important and fundamental issues.

I must say, at OGRA/ROMA I had the opportunity also to meet with Mr. Ron Eddy, who is the mayor of Brant county. Mr. Eddy, who has been an experienced municipal politician for many, many years, brought some of these concerns to the table and how we might address them.

Just to recount, we have provided Haldimand county with more than \$4.3 million in new infrastructure funding through Investing in Ontario. We've also provided an additional \$2 million to support economic recovery in Caledonia and Haldimand counties. More than \$1.3 million have been provided for 150 businesses in the Caledonia area. We've also provided some \$90,000 to the county of Haldimand for a comprehensive economic/industrial development marketing strategy. Indeed, we've provided some tools that will be very, very important to individuals who are in this particular area.

We know that these disputes are very, very challenging. Any time that you bring a series of personalities together—on one side, we have 400 years of history. One

of the things we can't do is rewrite those 400 years of history, but we can write a new history. I really think this is what this government, this Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs are attempting to do. But the only way to write that new history, I believe, will take all of us working together in common cause to create a path forward that everybody can be part of. We all need to be part of the solution to satisfy the very legitimate aspirations of the people who live in the community of Caledonia and the county of Haldimand.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? The member for Richmond Hill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thornhill. I'm very honoured today to stand in support of my colleague the member from Haldimand-Norfolk's private member's Bill 146.

I want to begin by relating a recent story to this Legislature. I was attending a media availability by Prime—I almost elevated him there—Premier McGuinty a couple of weeks ago. When the media asked Mr. McGuinty whether or not he would support an inquiry of this type, he immediately and very specifically said absolutely not, he wouldn't. That happened to coincide with the presentation for first reading of this bill by my colleague several hours later, so it was preordained as far as I could see.

The first thing that I asked myself was, if this is the case, if the Premier is going to pre-empt private members' business, what's the point? This is a legitimate question that we're considering today, because what we're discussing is the protection of people, homeowners and businesses in an area that has been beleaguered by a virtual siege for the past three years. I want to know, and my colleague wants to know, why it seems impossible on the part of this government to respect the wishes of this Legislature going back three years and, moreover, to offer protection to people who have every right to that protection.

Private members' business is basically the thought of a private member put forward in legislative or motion form where you vote yes or no on the basis of your conscience, not a whipped vote. But the first thing I hear from the other side on behalf of the member for Peterborough is that he's the minister's parliamentary assistant and so he's speaking literally on behalf of the government. We're not debating government business. I would appeal to members from all sides of this House to remember that when voting their conscience and think in terms of the people who are at the receiving end of the negativity for the past three years.

There have been no answers to the questions about what the government is doing or plans to do to put an end to the land disputes in Caledonia and the surrounding areas. Three years, and what we look at is a veritable badminton game played on one side by Premier McGuinty with the federal government. I don't hear much back from Ottawa, but every time there's a question asked of Mr. McGuinty, I certainly see him take that bat and throw it away.

The McGuinty government has stood by in this instance for too long. It sounds like we're all being very partisan, but I would like to see us work together on behalf of the people who are affected. I can't say that too often. Residents do not feel safe any more because there is no consistent policing. There is questionable security. There are no assurances that this is going to be put to an end any time soon. I would be very charitable in describing this as dereliction of duty.

In June 2006, we presented an opposition day motion in this Legislature, which was passed, calling for a commission to be set up, and here we are in March 2009. I'm going to quote from that motion: "inquire into and report on how absence of communication and lack of leadership by Premier McGuinty and his Liberal government allowed the Caledonia situation to escalate to a full-blown standoff and subsequently a public security crisis."

I repeat, that passed. So why have we not seen such an inquiry? Why have we travelled through time, three years, to get to a point where my colleague from Haldimand-Norfolk is still asking for an inquiry three years after the fact when people cannot buy or sell homes legitimately in that area, when people cannot do business legitimately in that area? It has been more than two years, and we're still waiting for that inquiry.

This is another example of the McGuinty government's lack of leadership or, as I have previously described it, dereliction of duty, and this is not something that is just going to go away if we ignore it. The longer nothing is done, the worse it's going to get.

1600

My party has been consistent on this issue in saying that the rule of law is not applied unevenly or at will; it is a one-size-fits-all situation when you talk about the rule of law. Here we're talking about the use of land, the disposition of land. It involves something on which I've questioned the government on a number of times over the course of the past year, and that's tobacco sales; that's attached to it, whatever. The rule of law should be applied equally across the province on all issues, and we don't see that in Caledonia.

We need answers about the lack of policing, which affects the lives of innocent people. We need answers for why the law does not seem to apply equally to everyone. There have been reports that the police have failed to respond to 911 calls when there have been threats and harassment from protestors. They refuse to enforce injunctions and contempt orders to end the occupation.

I would like to remind Mr. McGuinty that this is his responsibility, and it's a responsibility he has avoided for too long, hence Bill 146. The people of Caledonia want answers. In my opinion, that is the least we can do for them, the least you can do for them, since you have left them out to dry for over three years now. What will it take for Mr. McGuinty to call an inquiry?

Perhaps I can, one more time before I sit down, appeal to the members of this Legislature from all parties. This is not a bill, as important as some of these bills are, to add French to signs in Niagara or to declare Greenbelt

Day. They are good pieces of legislation; they are heartfelt by the people who present them. This is an important piece of legislation that we all should get behind, because it provides for answers to people who have no voice for themselves.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to the previous speaker, and I want to assure him and all members of this House that I have not been whipped. I want to assure him and all members of this House that New Democrats are free to vote on any bill as we see fit.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: On each ballot?

Mr. Michael Prue: On each ballot.

But I also want to tell this member that unfortunately I cannot support this bill, and I will not be supporting it.

The bill calls for an "administration of justice" for the OPP and senior government officials. I have looked at the situation of Caledonia. I have studied it as intently as one can from the confines of this building and from Toronto, and in a couple of attempts to get down close to and around the area over the last eight months. In my leadership bid, I got to Brantford and to other places, and talked to people about Caledonia.

It comes down to me, in my discussions, in my reading and in my understanding, that this is not an issue about the administration of justice, nor is it about the OPP and senior government officials, but in fact this is an issue about land claims. This is an issue about whether or not the land is legally owned by the people who claim to own it. This is an issue that goes back, not generations but hundreds of years, to the Haldimand land tract.

The province is responsible for making resource allocation decisions, whether that be land use, minerals, forests or other natural resources. The province, when it ignores this, the impact that these decisions have on traditional aboriginal peoples and territories, simply fuels frustration in those same peoples.

I take you back, not to Caledonia, but to another incident just in the last year or two. It was the famous one; it was debated day after day, questioned day after day in this Legislature. It was about the people of Big Trout Lake, or KI, and I wish I could pronounce the First Nations name but I cannot. Let me call it KI.

The First Nations traditional territory was encroached upon—let me be very gentle here—by a group called Platinex. They literally ran roughshod over the land. They did not consult with the First Nations people; they did not talk about land use planning or the use of the land, what they were looking for or what gave them the authority to do so.

When the people of KI stood up for their rights, they were placed in jail. These were not people who were doing anything untoward. They were standing up for the claims and for the land rights use that they had been granted by treaty more than 100 years before. You will remember that the KI Six, as they became known, included three grandmothers, people who were aged and had wisdom. They weren't young hotheads; they were

three grandmothers and the tribal elders who were there trying to protect their land.

I look back to the Haldimand area and try to draw some parallels, if indeed there are any. In the Haldimand area, the provincial land use decisions created many of these problems in first place. The first thing that has happened here is that in the last few decades there has been rapid urban development that stretched into the Haldimand Tract.

Just so everybody knows about the Haldimand Tract—and I think everybody in this Legislature will know—it was an area of six miles on each side of Grand River granted by Sir Frederick Haldimand to the Six Nations as compensation for the four million acres given up by the Six Nations when they joined the British in the American War of Independence. They got six miles on each side of the Grand River, land which was to be theirs in perpetuity. This was granted on October 25, 1784. The men and women who served with the British are Canadian heroes. They were heroes who helped ensure that Canada was not successfully invaded by the Americans who were invading Canada at that time. They fought for our independence, they assured the creation of Canada, and they were indeed heroes. They were granted the land, six miles on each side, and it was not long after that that another decree stated that the Six Nations can only surrender the land to the crown, and nobody else.

Therefore, what we have over these last couple of hundred years is land being surrendered or sold to people who had no right to have it. There's a whole dispute whether or not that was legal, whether it took place, whether it was proper, and I think this needs to be resolved. The Six Nations has submitted 29 land claims since 1980, none of which have been finally adjudicated upon. I think we in this Legislature have to look at that as well.

I also go back and look at what has happened in terms of land claims. The most famous case, of course, in the last number of years is the Ipperwash inquiry and the tragic death of Dudley George and the people around Ipperwash, the people who were looking to the land claims, to the burial grounds, to make sure that others did not come in and develop the lands in ways that were hurtful and improper to the First Nations people who lived there.

That Ipperwash inquiry took a long time to take place. It took far too long, but the justice and the truth finally came out in that inquiry. There were a couple of resolutions and a couple of recommendations made by the Ipperwash inquiry that I think need to be stated here, because if in fact this is what the police are attempting to do, then I think the police are acting properly. The Ipperwash inquiry stated two things, and I quote them both. First, "The OPP should maintain its framework for police preparedness for aboriginal critical incidents, aboriginal relations teams and related initiatives as a high priority and devote a commensurate level of resources and executive support to them." Now, if the police in Caledonia are in fact doing that and are behaving in the way that I think

they are behaving, and behaving as proper officers of the crown, then I think this is what they are doing. I would hope they're doing this. Perhaps one of the government speakers, when they speak later, can answer that: whether in fact these are instructions given to the OPP. But it's readily apparent to me that they're following a protocol if not identical to this, then very close to it.

The second one: "The OPP should develop a consultation and liaison policy regarding non-aboriginal communities which may be affected by an aboriginal occupation or protest. This policy should be developed in consultation with local non-aboriginal communities and should be distributed to local officials and posted on the OPP website." I have checked the OPP website, and I don't believe that has been done. If I am mistaken, please, one of the government members, tell me.

But those are two things that the Ipperwash inquiry recommended, and I think they were good, solid recommendations. The OPP's approach in Caledonia I think is a far better approach than what happened in Ipperwash. If anyone in this chamber thinks that it is not, let him or her stand up and say why the approach being adopted at Caledonia—where no lives have been lost, where no property has been burned, where the community is in far less turmoil than it was in Ipperwash—is a lesser statement or a lesser action than what happened in Ipperwash. We know that they're both difficult but I think what happened in Ipperwash was far more tragic.

1610

The Ipperwash inquiry also recommended—and I want to deal with this in the short time left—the establishment of the Treaty Commission of Ontario, an independent provincial organization to assist First Nations in fast-tracking land claims. This is exactly what it said:

"The Treaty Commission of Ontario should be established in a provincial statute as an independent agency reporting directly to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. The Treaty Commission of Ontario should have permanent administrative, legal and research staff and should be fully independent from the governments of Canada, Ontario and First Nations. The statute should specify that the purpose of the Treaty Commission of Ontario is to assist Ontario in discharging its treaty responsibilities."

Two years later none of that has been done, and two years later we have the ongoing problems at Caledonia. I would suggest to the government members opposite, if they truly wanted to resolve the issue at Caledonia and the hundreds of land claims that are still outstanding in this province, this is what should have been done and what can still be done during the term of this government's mandate. This would make far more sense than what has been called for today.

The sad part is the number of people whose lives have been affected: Caledonia residents, the Six Nations people and the countless businesses on both sides that operate in the area. Surely something must be done, but something must be done understanding the plight of the First Nations people. I ask members of this Legislature and all of you who have travelled around this province,

where you have gone to First Nations, not only in Caledonia but elsewhere, to recognize the deplorable conditions in which these people live.

I had the opportunity to grow up with a First Nations family living a couple of doors away from me when I was a young man. Their last name was Longboat and they were related to the famous Tom Longboat who brought Canada such great pride at the turn of the century—one of the fastest human beings on earth in those days.

Interjection: Ever.

Mr. Michael Prue: Ever, perhaps ever. They were a wonderful family.

I remember one of the young men; his name was Danny Longboat and he died tragically. My brother went from Toronto down to Brantford, down to the Six Nations, down to Caledonia, for the funeral. I did not go, but my brother went. They were really good friends. My brother came back horrified at what he saw there. He came back—I've told many times that I grew up in Regent Park, I grew up in housing. I grew up in places where people were poor. But my brother, as poor as we were and in the housing conditions in which we lived, came back horrified at the conditions in the Brantford area and in this particular place. He told me how ashamed he was in those days, even though it is now 20 or 30 or 40 years ago, of the way our First Nations people lived and how the Longboats lived and the place where he was buried, and all of those. I have never forgotten his sense—and I have never forgotten that as I have travelled around this province from one end to the other to see First Nations in disarray, kids with no hope, people with no opportunity, expense upon expense in northern reserves, in northern locations.

We need to look at that. We need to do something desperately as a government. I believe that the government opposite has an obligation to set up a commission as set out in the Ipperwash inquiry, but I do not believe the answer given by my friend is the right one here today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I'm certainly very pleased to be able to speak to this particular bill at this point. I was listening to the member for Thornhill, and he chastised the member for Peterborough in terms of his role as parliamentary assistant. I guess we don't necessarily hear the same thing as we're listening, because what I heard was the member for Peterborough talking about how he had made visits to the Caledonia area, the kinds of things he saw and his experiences there, which painted quite a different picture than we heard from the member for Haldimand-Norfolk.

I can speak from my own experience with Ipperwash and the Kettle and Stony Point First Nation in my own riding. I have watched the community that surrounds Kettle Point and Stony Point, as well as the First Nation, the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point, try to heal after the death of Dudley George. I watched as the inquiry took shape, and I watched as Justice Linden did a

yeoman's job in trying to bring reconciliation back to that community. The inquiry certainly dealt with the death of Dudley George, but more importantly, the recommendations talked about guidelines and ways to provide healing for all our First Nations in this province. It went well beyond the one incident.

I look to those recommendations as we deal with other First Nations issues, but I also know from my experience with my First Nations that there is frustration there. These people have land claims that we, as a community and as governments, have been very slow in dealing with. The frustration that comes from the First Nations has as much to do with our own procedures and our own lack of power and movement on these issues as anything else.

The community around Ipperwash and the First Nations communities there have a very fragile relationship at this point. The healing is moving forward. The reconciliation is starting. It's in its infancy, but it has moved. And I'm very proud of my constituents, because they're trying very hard to make this work. They recognize, as a community, that they're not going to be able to move forward economically—they're not going to be able to move forward together as a community—until that healing and reconciliation take place. They need to do that, and we, as a government, support that.

I'm very proud of the fact that my communities are working very hard. But there is certainly a very difficult feeling around it. I know that many members in the communities have memories of what happened in 1995. Those things never really leave you, and they don't leave the First Nation community either. That will always be a part of the relationship we have. It will always be a part of that healing and reconciliation process. It will always be there to remind us of something that was not a proud point in our history.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to support Bill 146, the Truth About Caledonia Act, introduced by my colleague from Haldimand-Norfolk. In 2006, the people of Ontario saw, through newspapers and television, the occupation of Douglas Creek Estates in Caledonia. They saw the standoff, the barricades on the highways and the riots in the street. Since then, other stories have captured media attention, and in spite of the incredible efforts of my colleague from Haldimand-Norfolk, many Ontarians have forgotten that there is still land being illegally occupied just a few hours' drive from this Legislature.

But the people of Caledonia can't forget. They experience the fear and lawlessness of the occupation. They have been living for three years with the fear that the situation will escalate. They have suffered through the collapse of their local economy and housing prices, and they live with the feeling of being abandoned by their government.

Let's be honest. This is not an easy situation for everyone: the natives, who believe this is their land; the police, who are doing their best to keep peace in a very difficult

situation; and the people of the community, who have had to live with the occupation. But regardless of the issues or background, we cannot encourage or allow a group—any group—to be above the law. We cannot accept areas of the province where the law does not apply.

We probably all remember, in June 2006, when two OPP officers were dragged from their car and the police cruiser window was broken. A spokesperson tried to explain the incident by saying that the officers had entered a no-go zone. Can we accept a no-go zone for the police in the province of Ontario?

When the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services was asked about the incident, he actually seemed to blame the police. He said:

"I can confirm that that event happened. But the situation is that the two OPP officers who had been assigned to the Caledonia area, who were not familiar with it, made a wrong turn. That was the extent of what happened. As a result of that, there was a reaction. That is something that is now being investigated, and I'm not in a position to comment on it, but I can tell you this: There was nothing untoward about it. It was a mistake that they made."

1620

Our police investigating and trying to keep the peace should never be referred to as a mistake, and no member of the government should excuse violence towards our police officers. There are strong allegations that there was political influence exerted on the police so they would not take action to end the occupation. The people of Caledonia and the people of Ontario deserve to know the truth about those allegations. I'm not making those allegations, but I think the people deserve to know about them.

The Ontario Provincial Police Association was quoted as saying that public image was being placed ahead of officers' safety and law and order. A report in the *Toronto Star* said that police officers weren't allowed to wear proper safety gear for "optical reasons." Our police officers deserve better than that. They deserve an inquiry to make sure that they aren't put into danger for political and public relations reasons.

A recent editorial in the *Brantford Expositor* said, "Silence is not a sufficient response. Part of the administration of justice involves ensuring public confidence in those involved in enforcing the law." They are right. There is probably no way that the occupation could continue this long without tension on all sides being pushed to the breaking point and fingers being pointed. For everyone's sake, we need answers.

In June 2006, the Ontario Legislature passed an opposition day motion calling for a commission to be set up and to inquire into and report on how the absence of communication and the lack of leadership by the Premier and his Liberal government allowed the Caledonia situation to escalate to a full-blown standoff and, subsequently, a public security crisis. Despite the fact that the motion received the support of the Legislature, the

McGuinty government has taken no action to set up a commission or provide answers to the people of Caledonia.

I want to congratulate the member from Haldimand-Norfolk for bringing forward this bill to represent his constituents in Caledonia and to help them move forward. I'm pleased that this bill is looking towards the future. The inquiry it creates would not only look at how we got to this point but it would look at ways to avoid these situations in the future. It's time for answers and action. It's time to launch an inquiry into this sad situation and look at what we can do to end it and to make sure that this never happens again.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak for these few moments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Dave Levac: I do want to make a quick comment on the introduction of this bill and the subsequent comments by the member from Beaches-East York. Thank you for understanding. I appreciate deeply the balanced approach that you took and the questions that you asked and I'll try to answer a couple of those questions, but more importantly, I stand to tell you: I will not be supporting this bill. I think it's ill-advised. I think that this bill has other means and other purposes, and I'll allow the member's words on the opposite side to be read to explain to us exactly why they're introducing this bill and its purpose. Just re-read their comments and you'll understand why I will speak vehemently against this bill.

Where was the member and where was the Conservative Party when, in March 2008, Monday, at the Best Western Brant Park Inn on Holiday Drive at the Grand River summit-Brant district, I brought together all of the stakeholders, including Brant, Brantford, New Credit, Six Nations, the province of Ontario, the government of Canada, the OPP, the municipal police, bankers, developers and homeowners to decide on a resolution to this issue in a peaceful manner and to discuss how we move forward in development and how we move forward in correcting some of the wrongs of the past?

The federal member was there. I want to know if the members on the other side want to support the petition that was sent around. In this petition, you talked about firing Fantino before you even had anything to say, before your inquiry. I want to know if you signed it. Do you want to make the prejudgment that Fantino's not doing his job?

The member from Beaches-East York just said the right thing. There's your answer. There's your roadmap. There's the way in which we can find peace in this community along the Haldimand Tract in Ontario. It's called the inquiry. Why? Because it sets out very clearly exactly how the roadmap is followed. The member for Beaches-East York, I want to explain to you very clearly that it is being discussed; the first Minister of Aboriginal Affairs was, and now this Minister of Aboriginal Affairs is, in discussions about how the treaty concept can go forward.

What is not being recognized very clearly is that the federal government is participating in the negotiations and the discussions. There are people from Six Nations who are talking right now with both federal, provincial and municipal representatives to move forward on how to get out of this quagmire without raising the temperature, because they know darn well that this has got nothing to do with lowering the temperature. All they want to do is to continue to raise the temperature and not actually solve the issue.

How many charges have been laid? One hundred fifty charges by the OPP. The implication is that they're not doing their job—46 officers have been hurt trying to do their job and keeping the peace. They don't want to go by your definition of what a police officer should do, because all you're talking about is, "I want to see people dragged away in handcuffs." That's not their job. Their job is to keep people safe and to keep the peace. Quite frankly, they're doing a darn good job of it, no thanks to the people who want to sit back and say, "Get them in handcuffs and take them away."

I want to see people elevate this into the discussion that it's supposed to be, and that is to get together to try to resolve something that's 200 years old. This member wants, in one bill, in a six-month time period, to report back? How do we get the land claims finished? We have got 200 years of corrections to make. I'm looking forward and I support that—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you, the member for Brant.

Further debate? I think there was a minute left, but there are no members, so Mr. Barrett, the member for Haldimand–Norfolk, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I thank the MPPs for participating in this debate.

The member for Peterborough made the reference to Mayor Ron Eddy. Please listen to Ron Eddy. He's a former Liberal member in this Legislature. The member for Peterborough and the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex hearkened back to Ipperwash and alluded to the death of Dudley George. People know the name of the person killed in Ipperwash. I don't know whether there's anybody in this room who knows the name of the police officer killed in Oka.

The member from Thornhill used the expression, "What's the point?" We have a preordained decision here by the Premier, by the PA to aboriginal affairs speaking on behalf of the government. I recognize as well that the member for Oxford also pointed out, as did the member for Thornhill, that this Legislature did pass the motion three years ago for an inquiry.

The member for Beaches–East York indicated that the NDP are not whipped. Private members' hour is just that: You have the opportunity to vote with your conscience. I don't think I'm going to see that happen here.

As far as the member from Beaches–East York—others have made reference to the approach that the OPP has been instructed to follow. I will point out that many

people in Caledonia disagree with that direction. There's a feeling locally that the OPP should enforce the law.

The member for Oxford: I appreciate the comments there, again suggesting that some body, someone at the upper level—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. You're out of time. In fact, the time provided for private members' public business has expired.

INACTIVE CEMETERIES PROTECTION ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA PROTECTION DES CIMETIÈRES INACTIFS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We will deal first with ballot item number 76, standing in the name of Mr. Brownell.

Mr. Brownell has moved second reading of Bill 149. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Mr. Jim Brownell: I'd like to refer the bill to the Standing Committee on General Government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): He has asked that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government. Agreed? Agreed.

GREENBELT DAY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE JOUR DE LA CEINTURE DE VERDURE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We will now deal with ballot item number 77, standing in the name of Mr. Dickson.

Mr. Dickson has moved second reading of Bill 153. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I recommend that we refer this to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): He asks that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. Agreed? Agreed.

TRUTH ABOUT CALEDONIA ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 CONCERNANT LA VÉRITÉ SUR CALEDONIA

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item number 78, standing in the name of Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Barrett has moved second reading of Bill 146. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? No. I declare the motion lost.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Will you agree that there was an "aye"? I didn't happen to hear it.

All those in favour, say "aye."

'All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1631 to 1636.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Barrett has moved second reading of Bill 146. All those in favour, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Barrett, Toby

Hardeman, Ernie

Shurman, Peter

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those opposed, stand at the same time.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Balkissoon, Bas
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Best, Margaret
Brotten, Laurel C.
Brown, Michael A.
Brownell, Jim
Cansfield, Donna H.

Duguid, Brad
Fonseca, Peter
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Kular, Kuldip
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
McNeely, Phil

Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Smitherman, George
Sousa, Charles
Tabuns, Peter
Takhar, Harinder S.

Colle, Mike
Craitor, Kim
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe

Mitchell, Carol
Naqvi, Yasir
Pendergast, Leeanna
Phillips, Gerry
Prue, Michael

Van Bommel, Maria
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
The ayes are 3; the nays are 40.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Orders of the day.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House is adjourned until Monday, March 23, at 10:30 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1639.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Brotten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
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Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
		Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	

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Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of International Trade and Investment / Ministre du Commerce international et de l'Investissement
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme
		Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
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		Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
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Vacant	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	

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Andrea Horwath, Phil McNeely
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permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Gerry Martiniuk, Paul Miller
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Vic Dhillon, Cheri DiNovo
Helena Jaczek, Shafiq Qaadri
Khalil Ramal, Peter Shurman
Elizabeth Witmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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Chair / Président: Greg Sorbara
Howard Hampton, Greg Sorbara
Norman W. Sterling, David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions / Comité
spécial de la santé mentale et des dépendances**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Elliott
Bas Balkissoon, Christine Elliott
Kevin Daniel Flynn, France Gélinas
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Second reading agreed to.....	5500
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**Greenbelt Day Act, 2009, Bill 153, Mr. Dickson / Loi
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Second reading agreed to.....	5500
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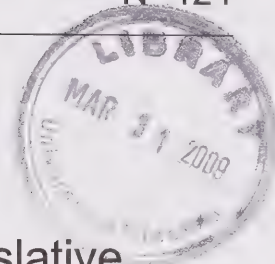
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of Ontario**

First Session, 39th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 23 March 2009

Lundi 23 mars 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 23 March 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 23 mars 2009

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF MEMBER FOR HALIBURTON-KAWARTHA LAKES-BROCK

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk has received from the chief electoral officer and laid upon the table a certificate of the by-election in the electoral district of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I have received a certificate of the by-election, addressed as follows:

"Mrs. Deborah Deller
"Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
"Room 104
"Legislative Building
"Queen's Park
"Toronto, Ontario
"M7A 1A2
"Dear Mrs. Deller:

"A writ of election dated the 4th day of February 2009 was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario, and was addressed to Jerry Ford, returning officer for the electoral district of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Laurie Scott who, since her election as representative of the said electoral district of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, has resigned her seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock on the 5th day of March 2009, Rick Johnson has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election, dated the 16th day of March 2009, which is now lodged of record in my office.

"Greg Essensa
"Chief electoral officer
"Toronto, March 23, 2009."

Mr. Johnson was escorted into the chamber by Mr. McGuinty and Ms. Smith.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House, Rick Johnson, member-elect for the electoral district of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, who has taken the oath and signed the roll, and now claims the right to take his seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Let the honourable member take his seat.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On Wednesday, March 11, the member from Kitchener-Waterloo, Mrs. Witmer, rose on a point of order with respect to a transit shelter advertisement sponsored by the member from Toronto Centre, Mr. Smitherman, a topic that was also raised in that day's question period. The member from Kitchener-Waterloo asserted that the advertisement is inappropriate because it refers to features of a bill that is still before this House, a bill that the member for Toronto Centre is carrying in his capacity as Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, and that the ad conveys the impression that it is presented by the government of Ontario.

While the member was not specific in her reasons for the latter assertion, a review of the ad and her remarks earlier that day in question period lead me to assume it is the appearance of the Ontario coat of arms that the member finds objectionable in this regard. The House leader for the third party, Mr. Kormos, contributed to the point by offering the view that as the piece promotes a policy of the government, it is partisan in nature and therefore runs afoul of the guidelines for acceptable, assembly-funded MPP communications to constituents.

How to address this has given me a bit of pause of thought. Approached from the perspective of communications funded by an MPP's budget, this would simply be an administrative matter of no concern to the House assembled. Simply put, the member for Kitchener-Waterloo does not have a valid point of order, for this matter impacts in no procedural way on the House.

However, the arguments relating to the references in the ad to a bill not yet passed by this House were more in the nature of a point of privilege, though it wasn't raised as such and proper notice was not given, in any event. Nevertheless, I undertook to review the issue and so will report to the House.

I have reviewed the advertisement very carefully, and let me say that the member for Toronto Centre's role as a minister of the crown should not prohibit him from communicating with his constituents on matters that fall

within the purview of his ministerial responsibilities. Naturally, though, if he were doing so with his MPP budget, the communications must be neutral; otherwise, as the member for Welland put it, the "people across the road" may not remit payment for it.

With respect to the issue of the ad leaving the impression that it is presented by the government of Ontario, the ad does not refer to the member's ministerial role at all, and though many of his constituents would know he is the Minister of Energy, the ad does not convey it. The use of the provincial coat of arms is perfectly acceptable. I know that many members on both sides of the House use it in their householders, on their business cards, in various print communications to their constituents, on their websites and on their letterhead.

Finally, the ad conveys that the legislation has not passed yet and does not imply a foregone legislative outcome. It uses the kind of conditional wording that previous Speakers have insisted upon when similar concerns have been raised in the past about government advertising and which was the basis for the ruling in the federal Parliament that the member from Kitchener-Waterloo referred to.

I will end by emphasizing the obvious and justifiable scrutiny that an MPP's communications must stand up to. Carefully erring on the side of probity and caution in these publications is most likely always the best course of action.

1040

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Peter Kormos: I want to introduce Brother Wayne Hanley, president, United Food and Commercial Workers; Brother Bob Linton, director of government relations and political action, United Food and Commercial Workers; and Brother Wayne Samuelson, president of the Ontario Federation of Labour.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to be able to introduce a whole host of people who are here supporting Rick Johnson, our newest MPP. Rather than trying to get all the names that I don't know, I would like to point out that Terri Crawford, Rick's wife, is in the gallery. Trish Johnson, his daughter, and Michael, his son, are in the gallery, as are a host of other family members. Up in the public gallery we have a lot of family, friends and supporters, including Gail Anderson, who's the executive director of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association. Rick has just finished being their past president.

Mr. Paul Miller: Today I'd like to introduce Sheila Alexander, from West Vancouver, who is visiting my executive assistant, Margo Duncan, both of whom are celebrating their birthdays today.

Hon. Jim Watson: I'd like to introduce in the gallery behind me, from the great community of Kingston, Paul Gerretsen.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It is now time for oral questions. The Leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition.

Applause.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Okay.

Applause.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Okay. You're cutting into my time. Thank you very much.

My question is to the Premier. With each passing day, Ontario keeps hitting milestones and, regrettably, all of them are bad. As reported in this weekend's Financial Post, and for the first time in 30 years, Ontario's jobless rate, at 8.7%, is higher than Quebec's. What's more alarming is that Ontario's unemployment rate is now higher than that in the United States. In the US, where the recession is said to have started, where the recession is expected to hit hardest, they have an unemployment rate that's lower than our province's. Premier, as leader of this province, do you accept any responsibility for these staggering figures?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question and the enthusiasm which attended its delivery.

I think that Ontarians are on to the notion that what we are grappling with is global in nature. There was a report recently released by the UN saying that we're going to lose between 30 million and 40 million jobs globally as a result of this worldwide economic recession. That recession is affecting virtually every country, virtually every subnational jurisdiction, including the province of Ontario. We are not immune to its consequences. It is affecting our families; it is affecting our businesses. I will not deny that. But I will say that I think that Ontarians are on to the notion that it is very big, it is very broad, and it's affecting us on a worldwide basis.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: That sounded like, "My hands are clean." The sign on former US President Truman's desk read, "The buck stops here," but in this Premier's case, it might read, "Hey, don't look at me."

An economist at Laurentian Bank Securities says Ontario's unemployment rate is expected to hit 10% next year. That means Ontario families haven't seen the worst of this.

Premier, this Thursday, Ontarians are going to expect to see a plan that's going to get them back to work so they can provide for their families and have hope for their future. Will they see that, Premier, or is that something else you're not responsible for?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We look forward very much to presenting the budget in this Legislature. We have indicated in the past that we have two overriding objectives for our budget: One of those is to help Ontarians weather the storm today, and the other is to ready ourselves collectively for the recovery.

While there is considerable debate among economists as to when the recovery is going to take place, there is an overwhelming consensus that a recovery will come. We hope it comes sooner rather than later, but we believe there are specific things we can and must do to strengthen Ontarians, to strengthen our businesses so that we are better prepared to seize new opportunities in the face of that recovery.

One of the things that I just announced last week was more support, for example, for our children growing up in poverty in the province of Ontario. We are doubling the Ontario child benefit from \$50 to \$92 a month. That is going to have a significant impact in those households which have to struggle with poverty on a daily basis.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Given the government's performance over the past six years, I think Ontarians have every right to be skeptical about your ability to deliver long-term, sustainable jobs. The Premier's private sector job creation, his record sits at a paltry 2%.

A year ago, in the face of 230,000 manufacturing job losses, the Premier responded with a retraining program that has fewer than 5,000 people in it. I think we'd all describe that as inadequate.

Premier, this past weekend, a number of financial analysts suggested that given the economic crisis Ontario is in, this week's budget requires a complete about-face from your previous tax-and-spend agenda. Premier, will we see that about-face this Thursday? Are you capable of changing the disastrous course you've been on for the past six years?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We will do what is needed. We will do what is essential to better protect our families from the ravages of this recession, and at the same time, we will continue to invest in the kinds of initiatives that strengthen Ontarians and strengthen our businesses. It would be nice to know that at some point in time we'll have support from the opposition in this regard.

We are in the process of cutting our business taxes, for example, by \$3 billion. The opposition opposes that.

We've invested billion and billions of dollars into infrastructure. We're building schools and roads and hospitals, hundreds of projects province-wide right now, employing nearly 100,000 Ontarians. The opposition does not support that.

We continue to invest in innovation. Ontarians are very creative, very innovative people. They're coming up with ideas that we want to commercialize, turn into new products, new services and new jobs for the future. Again, the opposition doesn't support those kinds of initiatives.

Our budget will continue to build on the strong foundation we have laid to date.

TAXATION

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Back to the Premier: The Premier clearly wants Ontarians to believe that he bears

no responsibility for the staggering unemployment rate—not his fault—or that he bears no responsibility for the 25% drop in corporate and land transfer tax revenues.

But, as the Financial Post pointed out this weekend, in the last five years the Premier neglected Ontario's changing economic landscape, raised corporate taxes, slapped a health care levy on households, and to quote the Post, "helped cement Ontario as one of the least attractive places for companies to invest."

Premier, recently you said that government has to stop being a brake on businesses. If your words are not just rhetoric, does that mean that this Thursday's budget will finally see an end to the job-killing capital tax and a plan to speed up corporate tax reductions?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, one of the initiatives that we have put forward and have adopted as a government is a reduction in business taxes: \$3 billion in cuts and rebates. We've eliminated the capital tax for manufacturers in the resource sector, retroactive to January 2007, and that meant \$190 million in rebates for our businesses in those categories.

The opposition didn't support those tax cuts. Some days they tell us they are in favour of tax cuts, and other days they tell us they're in favour of more spending on hospitals and our schools. We've been consistent from the outset. It is very difficult from one day to the next, in fact, if we pay close attention, sometimes from one question to the next, when it comes to the opposition, to know where they are coming from. Do they want us to spend more or cut more in taxes? It's hard to determine from one question to the next.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Again, the Premier's record truly speaks for itself. His government has increased spending by a staggering 48%. He has maintained taxes on job-creating new investment at 35%—that's 6% above the national average and ninth highest in the world. Even with a three-point drop projected for 2012, taxes on new investment will still be the highest in Canada. Jobs have disappeared because it was cheaper for businesses to close up and relocate outside of this province.

Premier, will you show that actions match words, set things right in this week's budget, follow the lead of your New Brunswick counterpart, and commit to making Ontario's business taxes competitive with other jurisdictions?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, we're trying to bring a balanced approach on this side of the House. We have been cutting taxes, but when we do that, we don't get the support of the opposition.

They tell us that we should have only spent at the rate of inflation. If we were to have adopted the approach that they are now advocating, that we should only have raised our investments, our new expenditures, at the rate of inflation, we would have spent \$17 billion less. That would have meant that, in health care, we'd have 10,000 fewer nurses today, we'd have 1,794 fewer doctors today, we'd have no family health teams—that means 200,000

fewer patients being seen—and we'd certainly have no new nurse-practitioner-led clinics. That's what they are advocating.

They like to play with numbers, but they don't like to talk about the consequences on people. Over here we bring a balanced, thoughtful approach. We continue to cut taxes, we continue to invest in the services—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: What you're really doing is putting Ontario in a dreadful position for the future.

Analysts and economists all agree that it's time for you to get the fundamentals right in order to get Ontario's economy back on track. Business taxes that attract job-creating investments provide the wealth that pays for the services that Ontarians rely upon, and with high taxes, Premier, you've chased away businesses that provided long-term private sector jobs. In effect, you've put hundreds of thousands of Ontarians out of work by your policies. As a result, tax revenues are way down, and you have to take out an \$18-billion mortgage on Ontario's future just to pay for basic services.

Premier, to a significant degree you have put yourself in this box, and Ontario families are paying the price. Will you ensure that this week's budget doesn't make Ontarians suffer even more?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, they are just trotting the same old one-trick pony out of the barn once again: "Business tax cuts will solve everything." We just don't see it that way. We're bringing a balanced approach.

We have cut business taxes. We continue to cut business taxes, to the tune of \$3 billion.

We continue to invest billions and billions into infrastructure because we think it's important to invest in new schools, new roads and new hospitals. Our plan, just recently announced, was to invest \$1.2 billion more, together with the federal government, in social housing and affordable housing in the province of Ontario. We think that's a real priority for families struggling with poverty. We continue to support innovation: Witness our new \$250-million emerging technologies fund. We continue to partner with businesses, including in the auto sector, and we continue to invest in the skills and education of our people.

That's a balanced, thoughtful, progressive, comprehensive approach which stands in stark contrast to their one-trick pony.

PROVINCIAL PURCHASING POLICY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Premier: Municipalities across Ontario are implementing buy-Ontario policies as a way of sustaining jobs and reviving their local economies. Gary McNamara, the mayor of Tecumseh, said this about his town's decision: "This is something that is important for our community. We buy Tecumseh, we buy Windsor, we buy Essex, we buy Ontario, we buy Canada. It's not difficult for us to put it in writing."

Apparently, though, for this government it is difficult to put in writing; otherwise, we wouldn't have Ontario flags and MTO uniforms manufactured overseas. So instead of letting Ontario tax dollars create jobs elsewhere, will this Premier commit to buy-Ontario legislation in this week's budget?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that my honourable colleague raises an important issue, and it's been the subject of much debate. Not only here in Ontario and in other provinces but indeed in many parts of the world now, people are wondering what they can do to better support their domestic economies. I think that we all have a responsibility to see where we can do that in a reasonable way.

But I just want to remind my colleagues that there aren't many places that are as trade-dependent as we are here in the province of Ontario. I mentioned late last week that when I was travelling, for example, to China, I was promoting our BlackBerry. What I was really promoting was the thousands of jobs connected with that BlackBerry. I was promoting Ontario icewine, for example, as well. I know that we need to do as much as we possibly can to promote Ontarian products and Canadian products, but at the same time, I wouldn't want to go so far as to compromise our ability to continue to trade with the world, because there are so many Ontario families that depend for their livelihood on that trade.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier knows that investing in infrastructure is key to sustaining jobs in Ontario. It takes a staggering 60 minutes or more for a one-way commute from Hamilton to Toronto. That leaves working parents with less time to spend with their kids. It's clear that Thursday's budget must make significant infrastructure investments, investments that are going to create good, long-term manufacturing jobs in this province.

A 50% buy-Ontario policy for transit coupled with strategic investments could transform Ontario's economy, from north to south, into a global hub for light rail systems. Why won't the Premier commit to a 50% buy-Ontario transit policy so that infrastructure investments also help to reinvigorate our struggling manufacturing sector in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague makes reference to 50%, but we've actually settled on 82%. That's the amount of funding, when it comes to our public transit projects, that's translated into Ontario-based economic activity. We're proud of the stimulus that we've injected into the economy, and obviously we've indicated that we'll have to do more with our budget.

One billion dollars in infrastructure for our smaller communities was something we announced recently, together with the federal government. Together with Prime Minister Harper, I had the opportunity to make this announcement: \$500 million for GO Transit improvements. I just announced that a couple of weeks ago. There will be more to come in that regard. We're going to do more, together with the federal government, to

stimulate the economy. This creates jobs on a short-term basis, exactly when they are needed, but that kind of infrastructure also has the long-term benefit of enhancing our economic productivity.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier knows very well that his 82% number talks about construction, and of course those jobs are going to be Ontario jobs. I'm talking about the manufacturing of the components that rail systems are made from, and he knows I'm talking about that.

Ontario has the skills and the industries to support a light rail strategy. Manufacturing powerhouses exist in Thunder Bay, Windsor, Oshawa, Niagara and Toronto. High-quality steel is manufactured in Sault Ste. Marie and Hamilton, plastics in Sarnia.

Infrastructure spending and deficits won't automatically lift us out of one of Ontario's worst recessions, and I think the Premier knows that. We need an Ontario plan for long-term growth in this province. We can make Ontario a light rail hub by building on the capacities that already exist here, making strategic investments and tying a buy-Ontario policy to new infrastructure spending in this province.

Why won't this Premier commit to a real 50% buy-Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, this is not unlike the kind of debate that's taking place in many other parts of the world, and I understand where the honourable member is coming from. Our number is 82%. We won't back away from 82%. That's how much of the money is actually going to translate into economic activity in the province of Ontario, how much is spent when it comes to our investments in new public transit.

I want to reassure Ontarians on another score: 95% of our almost 45,000 government suppliers are located in the province of Ontario. That's another number for us to keep in mind. Again, it's not 50%; it's 95%. We'll do as much as we reasonably can to invest Ontario dollars inside the province of Ontario without compromising our ability to continue to trade with the rest of the world, upon which so many Ontario families are very much reliant.

1100

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Again to the Premier: Today marks the 37th anniversary of Canada's ratification of the International Labour Organization's convention 87, Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize. This convention states that collective bargaining should be a fundamental right in every corner of the world, and we've signed on to it.

Today, United Food and Commercial Workers of Canada will be filing a formal complaint against this

government with the ILO to protest its failure to pass legislation guaranteeing farm workers the right to bargain collectively in this province. Why has this government defied an international body and refused to give farm workers the right to bargain collectively in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: The honourable member would know that at this point in time, this very issue is before the courts, so that would prevent me from making any comment on the particulars that she has asked about.

What I can say is that this government, I believe, has a very solid record in terms of valuing the work of farmers and those who work on farms; they provide us with the very best-quality, safest food in the province of Ontario. We have done and we'll continue to work with that sector to ensure that it's a viable, strong industry going forward. It's the industry that feeds our people. It's the industry that we have worked with, and we'll continue to do so.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The minister knows very well that the only reason it's before the courts is because this government is dragging it before the courts once again instead of doing the right thing by farm workers in this province.

Here are the facts—and it's interesting that we choose the Minister of Agriculture as opposed to the Minister of Labour when this is a labour issue: The complaint charges that Ontario's ban on agricultural unions violates the human and constitutional rights of Ontario agricultural workers. In other words, your government is denying thousands of Ontario agricultural workers the fundamental right granted to farm workers in most other advanced jurisdictions around the world. Why is this government denying a fundamental right to some of Ontario's most exploited and vulnerable workers?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

The health and safety of all Ontario workers is our number one priority. What I can tell the honourable member is that our government extended occupational health and safety to our farm operations. This was our government that brought that forward.

Yes, there is an appeal, and it's around ensuring that farm workers are safe, are protected and are being treated fairly, and that's what our government has done. We have listened. We have worked with farmers. We have worked with farm workers. I acknowledge that the UFCW is here today. I have met with—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: One of the best guarantees for a safe workplace is a strong union that's looking after the back of the worker. I'll let the minister know that.

Today's ILO complaint follows a November 2008 decision by the Court of Appeal for Ontario, and every-

body across the way knows it. That court ruled unequivocally that Ontario legislation that prevents farm workers from unionizing is unconstitutional and it ordered the Ontario government to change the legislation within 12 months. Instead, the Ontario government has applied for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada to review the decision. Why does this government continue to do everything within its powers to deny a basic right to some of the most exploited and vulnerable workers in this province?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: As I said to the member, our number one highest priority is the health and safety of all Ontario workers, including our farm workers. That's why our government extended the Occupational Health and Safety Act to farming operations.

Also, I want to say to the member that the Ontario government believes that the Court of Appeal's decision raises issues that should be considered by the Supreme Court of Canada. So we feel that these issues need to be looked at. The Supreme Court will be able to do that.

As I say to the member, this government continues to meet with labour groups. I've had all the labour groups in my office. We've had discussions. We meet with farmers and farm operations. We want to ensure the greatest health and safety for all our workers.

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier: While other provinces have acted to help create jobs and assist families during these tough economic times, Dalton McGuinty seems absolutely paralyzed in the face of economic crisis. Working Ontario families have given up to \$2,000 more per year in higher taxes, user fees and energy costs. What did they get in return? Record job losses and massive provincial deficits.

Last week, Liberal Premier Shawn Graham of New Brunswick announced some of the biggest tax cuts in the province's history to put more money in working families' pockets and to stimulate job creation. Premier, on Thursday, will you finally do the same?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question. It's passing strange that the honourable member is telling us that he wants us to cut business taxes, but when we've been cutting them by \$3 billion, he has failed to offer his support in that regard.

I think the member has made it clear, though, of late in particular, that he does not believe that we should have made investments in new nurses in the province of Ontario, he does not believe that we should have made investments in hiring more teachers in the province of Ontario, he does not support reduction of wait times in the province of Ontario, and he does not support the investments we made in new water inspectors and meat inspectors and those kinds of things which our families absolutely have to be able to count on.

We're bringing a thoughtful, balanced, comprehensive approach. We will continue to find ways to support businesses and to support our families at the same time.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: While Premier McGuinty stands paralyzed, this is what Finance Minister Boudreau in New Brunswick said: "This plan will leave more money in the pockets of New Brunswickers.... It will help ... companies stay in the province to grow and attract outside investment, and help create meaningful jobs for our children to ... work right here in our province." There's nothing of that kind from Dalton McGuinty. In fact, what is the McGuinty record? It's 300,000 manufacturing job losses, runaway deficits—and, sir, under your watch, you have turned Ontario into a have-not province. What passes for an economic plan has been a spectacular failure in the province of Ontario.

Premier, it's time to chart a new course. Will you follow the example of New Brunswick and other provinces and what the Ontario PCs have called for to stimulate job creation in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's the same old story, it's the same old movie, it's the one-trick pony. There is a utopia; there is a magic elixir; there is a silver bullet. Pick your favourite metaphor; they're all to be found in simply cutting business taxes. That's all we have to do.

The other part of the story they don't like to talk about is the corresponding cuts to health care, cuts to education, cuts to environmental protections, and cuts to support for our most vulnerable Ontario families. We've seen that movie before; we don't want a rerun.

We will continue to move forward with a thoughtful, balanced, comprehensive, progressive approach. We'll find a way to support the economy and support our families at the same time.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Premier: Today the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care members are delivering thousands of petitions from across the province directly to the Minister of Finance, calling for an increase in child care funding. Shamefully, only 12% of Ontario families have access to licensed child care. Without additional funding in Thursday's budget, at least 22,000 child care spaces are on the chopping block in this province.

What does the Premier have to say to those tens of thousands of parents and concerned Ontarians who signed those petitions, pleading for better child care in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think the leader of the third party knows that this is a party that is absolutely committed to giving kids the best start in life. Since we were elected in 2003, we've increased the number of child care spaces by 22,000. That is despite the federal government slashing the early learning and child care agreement.

We are calling upon the federal government to restore funding for child care because it is a very important

component of the well-being of our children. We would welcome support from all members of this House to encourage the federal government to get back into child care. We need them at the table.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Shame on the minister for not acknowledging that child care is a provincial responsibility. What happened to their \$300-million promise on child care?

Ontarians still need adequate, affordable, not-for-profit, licensed child care in this province. The child benefit that they've announced recently—and congratulations on that—took so long to get here, didn't it? But that's not going to bring child care spaces into the province. That's what your obligation is as a minister.

The number of spaces in this province is woefully short already on what is needed and what is necessary to provide the services for families and kids. Child care is an economic necessity so that parents can go to work or they can go to school. Will the Premier treat it as such and commit the minimum \$300 million in new money for child care in this Thursday's budget?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I suspect that the member understands that the budget is on Thursday and I certainly am not going to be speaking to what's in the budget today. So we are going to have to wait.

But let's keep this in perspective. We are working very hard to sustain the spaces that we have created. It's very important. At the same time, we are moving forward on full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds. That's going to make a remarkable difference for families and kids in this province. So as we work with the federal government to get them reinvesting their money here, we will continue to fund.

Just for your information, I think it's important that people understand what we're talking about. We spend, in this province, \$869 million on child care; \$63.5 million is what we are fighting to get from the federal government. So we are concerned, we are working hard, but let's not be alarmist about the numbers that we're talking about.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Rick Johnson: My question today is for the Minister of Transportation. Minister, I recently had the opportunity to travel in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock fairly thoroughly. In those travels I had the chance to meet thousands of constituents. I spoke with them and heard from them about what they think this government is doing right and where they have concerns. Transportation is a topic that arose often, from the desire to have more public transit to requests for further improvements to roads and bridges in the area.

I would like to ask the Minister of Transportation about transportation issues in my riding, specifically about Highway 35. Four-laning Highway 35 is something we have seen in the books for years. It is an important

economic link for those in Lindsay, Pontypool and surrounding municipalities. I've heard from my constituents that this is something that they want to see happen and happen soon. I'm wondering why it is taking so long to move forward with the four-laning of Highway 35 from Highway 115 to Lindsay, and I'm hoping the minister can share with this House the next steps in moving forward on this project.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I thank the member for his question. He has met with me on this matter and other important matters already. He will know that I've also met with the local municipalities that he represents at this time.

Everyone agrees, I think, that the improvements to Highway 35 are important to those living in Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. That is why the ministry completed what we call a transportation environmental study report, which was made available for public review. I've spoken with the staff on this matter, and I'm pleased to tell the newest member of the House that any outstanding concerns raised have been resolved. We're looking forward to the release of an addendum to the TESR in the coming weeks. It'll be made available for public review within 45 days. Public consultation will continue to play a vital role as we move forward with this extremely important project that the member has brought—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Rick Johnson: I would like to thank the minister for his answer. I will let the constituents of my riding know that there's some opportunity for public comment when the addendum is made available. Improvements to Highway 35 will help with alleviating congestion in the area, both from local residents driving to and from work and from the many tourists who visit our beautiful riding throughout all seasons of the year.

While it's important to continue with improvements to roads, I know that it is also a priority of this government to get people onto public transit. It's important that people have the opportunity to change their travel behaviours and be encouraged to use things like public transit and carpooling to do so. I understand that this government is invested in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock to do just that. I was hoping that the Minister of Transportation can share with the House and with the constituents of my riding some of the details of the proposed four-laning of Highway 35, as well as what else the ministry has done to improve transportation throughout Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Hon. James J. Bradley: That's an excellent question. The Ministry of Transportation staff, as the member will know, have worked hard to listen to the residents' concerns when it comes to the improvements to Highway 35.

The plan includes the following:

- four-laning;
- 10 new interchanges;
- interchange improvements at Highway 35/115;
- realignment of Highway 7A to connect with Highway 35; and

—a service road network that facilitates continuous movement.

Public transit is also a priority, as the member appropriately points out. He'll be pleased to know his riding has benefited from our commitment to increasing and improving public transit. Recently, Haliburton was the recipient of a transportation demand-management grant for almost \$32,000 for building capacity for active transportation, and Kawartha Lakes recently received their fifth instalment of gas tax funding, for a total of \$2.6 million since the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Premier. Last week in Ottawa, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing consciously and deliberately leaked privileged budget information when he announced over \$600 million of new social spending. Does the Premier condone and did he authorize this wanton breach of budget secrecy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: First of all, I want to begin by assuring and reassuring members of the Conservative Party, in particular, that the budget will be presented in this Legislature. I want to provide that level of comfort.

I also want to say that we are proud to work with the federal government to invest together \$1.2 billion in repairs to some 50,000 social housing units. At the same time, we're going to invest in building some 4,500 new, affordable housing units, which we think is great news, especially for families who are struggling to get ahead, finding it particularly challenging at this point in time, given this worldwide recession. We think it's important news, and we're proud to have gotten it out to Ontarians, who know it's on the way.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: What's at issue here is not the merit of any particular program or line item in the budget; it is instead the parliamentary convention of budget secrecy. That convention is based on two important principles: First, no one should have privileged access to budgetary information in advance of the budget such that they're in a position to gain financially from that information. Second, it is a matter of courtesy and respect for this institution that all important announcements be made here first.

It follows that members of the Legislature, assembled together, should be the first to hear the contents of the budget and respond on behalf of their constituents. This is our fundamental role as an elected Legislature, which is being usurped by the government's deliberate strategy to leak budget information to its own political advantage.

Will the Premier commit to this House that there will be no further breaches of budgetary secrecy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: I was very proud to be at 20 Rochester Street talking about this government's track

record in supporting affordable housing in the province of Ontario—a stark contrast to the sad story of the Conservative Party, who shut down housing projects throughout the city of Ottawa and throughout the province of Ontario.

Let me just read you from Jo-Anne Poirier, the CEO of Ottawa Community Housing, who said, "The province is opening its wallet once again, supporting its commitment to improve the quality of life for the residents of social housing and assisting in the sustainability of Ontario's housing infrastructure.... 'We see this as a significant advancement and very welcome news.'"

We're not turning our backs on some of the most vulnerable people in our community, and we were proud to stand with housing leaders from across Ontario and announce that we're investing in affordable housing in the province of Ontario.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Labour. More evidence emerged last week of exploitive recruitment practices of foreign workers, specifically of vulnerable foreign women workers, under the live-in caregiver program. This has highlighted a desperate need for action. Will the Minister of Labour take immediate steps to protect these workers?

1120

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'll let the member know that on this file, I've met with the Undersecretary of Labour of the Philippines, and I've met with Alejandro Mosquera, the Consul General of the Philippines, here in Ontario.

This is a very complex issue. It is the responsibility of the federal government with the live-in caregiver program. I've imparted to Minister Kenney that they should look at making amendments to this program to safeguard those workers. I will continue to do that. I know that Minister Chan has done the same. We want to ensure that those workers are protected. But this is the responsibility of the federal government. We do not want a patchwork across the country. We want the federal government to take an umbrella approach to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The Minister of Labour should know that employment standards is a provincial matter. It's his responsibility to act. In fact, Manitoba has acted. On April 1, Manitoba's Worker Recruitment and Protection Act will come into full effect. Among its provisions, the act will improve protection for foreign workers by prohibiting recruiters and employers from collecting fees from workers, require employers involved in international recruitment to register with the province, and require new provincial licences for agencies and individuals, because licensing is also a provincial responsibility.

Ontario can do this too. It is within the reach of Bill 139. You could do this, Minister, simply by making amendments to Bill 139. Will the minister make the necessary amendments?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I can say to the member that she's right on one thing. Yes, the Employment Standards Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act do cover all those workers in Ontario. They are covered. This Friday, I met with the reporters at the Toronto Star who have done those pieces. I talked to Rob Cribb. I spoke to Dale Brazao. I explained to them that those workers are covered. We asked those workers, if they are in precarious situations, to call our employment standards, to call our inspectors. We want to ensure that they are protected.

But to the member, again, this is a federal program. The live-in caregiver program is a federal program. Minister Kenney, I understand, is bringing forward some amendments in the next two weeks. We hope those amendments will help ensure the protection of those workers.

AFFAIRES FRANCOPHONES

M. Phil McNeely: Ma question est pour la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones.

L'année prochaine, Orléans va célébrer son 150^e anniversaire. Je soutiens fièrement la communauté francophone de ma circonscription, et en tant que francophile convaincu, je crois que cet anniversaire sera une date importante pour toute la francophonie ontarienne.

Aujourd'hui, Ottawa-Orléans abrite l'une des communautés francophones les plus vibrantes de la province. Aujourd'hui, je suis fier de prendre la parole et de reconnaître le travail du centre culturel francophone de notre communauté. Le MIFO, Mouvement d'implication francophone d'Orléans, a depuis 30 ans soutenu et fait la promotion de la culture de la communauté francophone d'Orléans, tout en offrant des services en français dans le domaine de l'éducation et des arts. Le MIFO travaille fort à dresser les ponts entre les communautés linguistiques de ma circonscription.

Madame la ministre, pouvez-vous me dire de quelle manière—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

M. Phil McNeely: —d'organismes culturels comme le MIFO soutiennent l'expression—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Je voudrais remercier le député d'Ottawa-Orléans pour son soutien de la francophonie ontarienne.

Notre action au niveau de la culture et des services en français est multiple. Nous avons, par exemple, augmenté considérablement le financement du secteur franco-ontarien du Conseil des arts de l'Ontario; il a passé d'un million de dollars en 2002-2003 à 2,5 \$ millions aujourd'hui et permet d'appuyer divers organismes culturels comme le Centre franco-ontarien de folklore, le Regroupement des organismes du patrimoine franco-ontarien, la société d'histoire et de généalogie et le Festival franco-ontarien.

De plus, je suis très fier d'avoir eu l'occasion de réaffirmer la position de notre gouvernement à l'occasion des audiences du CRTC en janvier dernier sur l'importance des médias francophones dans l'épanouissement culturel de notre communauté. De plus, nous avons fait

un grand pas lorsque nous avons donné l'indépendance à TFO—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Merci. Supplementary?

M. Phil McNeely: Je suis heureux d'entendre que le gouvernement participe activement à la protection et à la promotion de la culture francophone à Orléans et dans toute la province.

Cependant, la population franco-ontarienne continue à lutter parfois pour obtenir des services gouvernementaux dans sa langue, comme la loi l'exige. Les francophones d'Orléans ont la chance de vivre dans une région où les services en français du gouvernement provincial sont généralement disponibles.

Madame la ministre, j'aimerais que vous nous disiez ce que le gouvernement fait pour améliorer la délivrance en français des services du gouvernement dans la province.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Je concède qu'encore aujourd'hui, il n'est pas toujours facile pour les Franco-Ontariens de se faire servir en français dans certaines régions de la province. Mais il est incontestable que le gouvernement, depuis son arrivée au pouvoir, a fait énormément de progrès dans ce domaine.

Pensons d'abord aux investissements massifs en éducation afin de freiner le phénomène d'assimilation et de permettre à nos jeunes de travailler et de réussir leur carrière en français chez nous en Ontario.

Depuis 2003, le gouvernement a versé plus de 360 \$ millions supplémentaires dans le système d'éducation de langue française. Au postsecondaire en français, nous avons augmenté le financement de 57 %. Nous avons aussi fait des investissements importants—on pense au campus de l'Université de Hearst à Timmins, à la création du nouveau centre d'excellence au Collège Glendon de l'Université York, et au nouveau centre de recherche et de formation de La Cité collégiale à Ottawa.

Comme vous le voyez, notre gouvernement a dit qu'il allait agir, et il a agi—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Merci. New question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Premier. According to Dr. Michael Lawrie, president of the medical staff at Cambridge Memorial Hospital, the hospital is "sadly underfunded." Yesterday, my colleague Gerry Martiniuk and I, along with 500 people, attended a rally, and these people said that they agree with the doctor. They are demanding that your government not only give them fair funding for their hospital in a fast-growing community, but that you not cut oncology, pediatrics and obstetrics.

Premier, you told the federal government you need more health care; you need to share it equally. You now have more funding. Will you also share with Ontarians and give Cambridge Memorial Hospital its fair share—about \$280 more per resident—and protect their hospital services?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question from my honourable colleague, and I'll speak to it momentarily, but in passing, I would recommend that she speak to her colleague Mr. Hudak, who says that we've invested too much in the course of the past five years in health care generally.

Just by way of specific contrast, we've increased funding for hospitals in Waterloo by 24%. Her colleague says we shouldn't have gone beyond 10.3%, just so we're clear on that score. We've increased funding for St. Mary's hospital by 31%, Grand River Hospital by 30%, Cambridge hospital by 16%, and \$8 million invested in the region to reduce wait times specifically, which is working in a number of ways. We have come to the table, and I assume from the basis of the question that my colleague is asking us, in the coming budget, to make sure we continue to invest in health care for Ontario families.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: What happened to Cambridge and the half million citizens of Waterloo region, one of the fastest-growing areas in Ontario? We have been forgotten. Not one cent for fast-growth funding in Grand River Hospital—not a cent—not one cent for fast-growth funding in Cambridge and only a pittance for St. Mary's in cardiac care.

Cambridge's hospital was ordered to be expanded 10 years ago. John Milloy, on behalf of George Smitherman, put a shovel in the ground on December 21, 2005, and not a thing has happened since. The feds gave you almost half a billion in new health dollars. Giving you money like that is a waste of time; they might as well have given it to AIG. Stop playing politics with the lives of the people of our region. When will the expansion of Cambridge Memorial Hospital be built?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the passion, but I wonder where it was when the member sat in government and when the government of the day cut funding to health care in the province of Ontario.

Again, when it comes to the community—Waterloo health care—we have increased funding for St. Mary's hospital by 31%, Grand River Hospital by 30%, Cambridge Memorial Hospital by 16%. The community is now home to nine family health teams serving 183,000 patients.

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I take it from the member's question, once again, that he's asking us to ensure that our budget includes more supports for our families, more supports for their schools, more supports for their health care. At the beginning of question period, they asked us to do one thing alone, which is to cut taxes for business. I want them to know—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. New question.

UNIVERSITY FUNDING

Mr. Rosario Marchese: A question to the Minister of Training: Despite the fact that the Premier himself has aligned the economic recovery of this province with the

knowledge economy, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations report released today shows that our universities are in serious trouble. The report confirms what we've been saying for a long time: over-subscribed courses without enough seats for students, larger classes, classes folded into other classes when faculty members retire, fewer full-time professors, less student-faculty interaction, fewer labs and individualized assignments. When will you pull Ontario out of the cellar in terms of funding and allow our universities to lead us into the knowledge economy and out of the current recession?

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the honourable member's question, and I appreciate the work that's done by OCUFA in terms of talking about how we want to move forward in terms of our colleges and universities. But I reject the premise of the honourable member's question. Under the leadership of Premier McGuinty, we've made post-secondary education a priority for this government. In 2005, we brought forward the Reaching Higher plan, which represented one of the largest single investments in our colleges and universities in Ontario's history. Its focus was on accessibility for students as well as excellence.

Let the statistics speak for themselves: Operating funding at colleges and universities has increased by 57% since 2003. On the infrastructure front, on my watch alone, this mandate, since 2007, we have invested nearly \$1 billion in terms of upgrading—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Just once, I want to see you stand up and say we are not number 10 any longer. Then your numbers and your stats would mean something, because they don't at the moment.

Based on the polling of 2,000 faculty members and librarians, this report states: "The continued neglect of our universities through swelling classes, detrimental hiring practices, and deteriorating facilities will prove disastrous to our province's ability to provide quality education and deliver a strong research capacity."

If your ministry is not prepared to lead us into the knowledge economy, who will?

Hon. John Milloy: For once I would like that honourable member to stand up and admit what everyone in this Legislature knows, which is that Ontario has one of the finest post-secondary education systems in the world.

Last year, over 37,000 students from around the world chose Ontario universities.

Let me tell the member a few facts about the Ontario system. Two of Ontario's universities scored within the top 100 in the Academic Ranking of World Universities. Five of the world's top 200 universities, according to the Times Higher Education Supplement, are from Ontario. The University of Toronto, which the honourable member helps represent, and the University of Waterloo, made Newsweek's top 100 global universities index. York University's Schulich School of Business is ranked

first among Canadian business schools and ranks eighth in the world for financial services.

We continue to make post—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

In my community and communities across Ontario, health care is a key issue. My constituents want to know that are we doing everything we can to ensure that their families have access to quality health care. In these times of economic challenges, people are anxious to know that the public institutions they have come to rely on will continue to serve them well.

In order for our health care system to continue to thrive, the government must ensure that an adequate supply of doctors, nurses and other health care professionals are being trained to meet increasing demand. I often hear from constituents who do not have a family doctor or access to a primary health care provider.

Speaker, through you to the minister, can you tell me what are you doing to ensure that Ontario's families have access to doctors and nurses in their communities?

Hon. John Milloy: I thank the honourable member for the question and for his advocacy on behalf of this important issue. The post-secondary education system has been expanded to allow for the training of more doctors and nurses under our watch. In fact, we've increased the number of first-year medical spaces by 160 new spots since 2004. We've also expanded medical education to bring it closer to more communities, supporting the creation of four new undergraduate satellite medical campuses in St. Catharines, Waterloo region, Windsor and Mississauga.

We're also taking steps to train more nurses. Last year our government provided colleges and universities with over \$81 million to support nursing degree programs in Ontario. This helped over 3,700 new full-time entrants enrol in nursing degree programs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Mauro: In northern Ontario, we face unique challenges when it comes to training and recruiting health care professionals. Studies show that students are more likely to stay and practice where they study. That is why my community was delighted by the news that Thunder Bay would be home to a new campus of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, more commonly known as NOSM. I can recall clearly the decision by the government of the day not to award a campus for the medical school to Thunder Bay. It was a fantastic effort on the part of many people in our community that ultimately forced the change in the publicly announced decision that only Sudbury would be home to Ontario's newest medical school. NOSM will play a pivotal role in encouraging more doctors to practise and settle in Thunder Bay, Sudbury and elsewhere in the north.

Minister, you know NOSM has just passed its fourth anniversary. Could you please update us on the progress made by NOSM so far?

Hon. John Milloy: I congratulate the member for the support that he has offered and that of his community for NOSM. I'm pleased to report to the Legislature that last week, NOSM was granted full accreditation by the Committee on the Accreditation of Canadian Medical Schools and the Liaison Committee on Medical Education. These two organizations work together to set, maintain and improve the standards for undergraduate medical education at all Canadian medical schools. Receiving full accreditation for NOSM's MD program is the final step in a multi-year process aimed at ensuring the school meets all the required standards.

Accreditation is yet another milestone in a year of many for NOSM. This spring, the school will celebrate its first graduation of medical school undergraduates and the completion of the first group of family medicine residents from the family medicine residents of the Canadian Shield program.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Frank Klees: To the Minister of Transportation: At a time when people can least afford it, two of the largest providers of public transit in this province are hiking fees for commuters. The TTC is slapping a new parking fee on Metropass holders that will translate into a increased cost of some \$1,400 a year. GO Transit hit its riders with a fare increase this month. Surely, the minister agrees that these increases couldn't come at a worse time.

My question to the minister is this: Why does he remain silent, as the Minister of Transportation, on these fare increases? And will he step in to ensure that, at this time, not only will those fare increases contradict his government's stated policy of expanding public transit and protecting consumers—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Of course, I say to the member, you know that an unprecedented amount of money is being invested in GO Transit services and all public transit services in this province. He will recall when the government, of which he was a part, cut funding completely. For three years, I believe it was, there was absolutely no capital funding that came from the Conservative government. They totally abandoned—I know he spoke against it; I know that, secretly, he spoke against it—any expenditures on GO Transit in terms of capital. It was down to a measly \$30 million, measly in terms of what we expend today on GO Transit in terms of operating.

In order to be able to ensure that we are going to have vast improvements taking place, we have those who use it contributing and the general taxpayers contributing. So I guess this is a spend question, because he would like the government—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Actually, it's not a spend question at all; it is an accountability question. What I'm asking

the Minister of Transportation to do, which I know he can do if he chooses to, is to hold both GO Transit and the TTC accountable for how they're spending the money that is transferred to them by the province. What he should be doing as the Minister of Transportation is saying to GO Transit and to the TTC, "At this point in time, with the economy what it is, we cannot download additional costs on commuters," and they should look to their own budgets, balance them and deliver efficient service without downloading it on commuters.

Interjection: The duke.

Hon. James J. Bradley: As my colleague says, you were part of a government that was the duke of downloading, as far as municipalities were concerned.

I know on one hand that the member legitimately asks, as do his colleagues, that we improve GO service in the province of Ontario, that we undertake major projects to get out of the traffic jams we're in at the present time. I agree with him, whenever he or his colleagues ask that. What it requires is an investment both on the part of the general public—and that's why I say it's a spend question in this particular case, because he's implying that the general taxpayer should pay more and more—but also, a contribution is asked from those who actually use the system.

I know that the member would never want to see a diminishing of GO service. He'll be supporting our vast expansion of it and he's happy, I'm sure, that the provincial government is back in the public transit business.

SEVERANCE PAYMENTS

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. Last week I travelled to Windsor to support Aradco and Aramco workers, whose plants had recently closed. They were forced to lock themselves in their plant to protest the fact that they did not receive the back pay, vacation pay and severance pay they were owed. In the current economic climate, it is more important than ever to pass my Bill 6, the legislation I introduced in December 2007, which would create a fund to provide laid-off workers monies owed if their company went under.

While they eventually reached a deal, they only received about eight weeks' vacation pay, a lot less than the \$1.5 million they were owed. This would never have happened if this government had passed Bill 6, or even dealt with it. Why won't this government pass Bill 6?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'm not sure if the member is aware of this, but he should be aware of this. This province, the province of Ontario, has the best severance protections in the whole country. My predecessors and I have written to Minister Blackburn and we have written to Minister Ambrose about the wage earner protection program. We continue to advocate to include termination severance. They have done that. We've asked them to ensure that it rolls back to when they brought forward the wage earner protection program, and that was July 2008.

This Premier has continued to advocate for fairness when it comes to Ontario workers and employment insurance. Ontario workers should—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1143 to 1300.

WHITNEY BLOCK

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Before we move to introduction of guests, we're having some difficulties with the bells working over in the Whitney Block right now. We're attempting to correct that. So I would just say to the members who are here and the others who may be back in their offices, and to their staff as well, that in the event of any division, I would hope that you'll be watching the televisions closely today. Hopefully, the bells will be working in Whitney tomorrow, but I will keep you informed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I'm delighted to welcome Merv Hillier, Katharine Harvey, Angie Brennand and Sharon Armstrong from the Certified Management Accountants of Ontario; Ted Wigdor from the Certified General Accountants of Ontario; and Tom Warner and Chris May from the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario. Welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DAYCARE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: When is this government going to keep its promise to the Treasure Island Daycare Centre?

In a January 28 letter, Minister Matthews states: "I appreciate the urgency of your funding requests and recognize the difficulty you face in having to relocate your child care centre from the OPP headquarters in Orillia. However, given the unique situation you face, our government will work with you to ensure there is adequate funding available to help Treasure Island and the families and children you serve move smoothly into a new site, based on its detailed business plan." That was two months ago.

Today, I got another letter from Scott Beaumont, the chairman of the board of Treasure Island Daycare Centre. He says, "It is with great urgency that we, the board of directors of Treasure Island Daycare Centre, appeal to you for financial support for our relocation project. Despite the commitment you made to assist Treasure Island in your January 28 letter, funding has not been confirmed."

There are a number of reasons they add here.

In conclusion he says, "Every family needs to feel secure in their child care arrangements. Every employee

needs to feel secure that their job will be there tomorrow. I urge you to act without delay and provide funding to support Treasure Island's relocation proposal."

It is your OPP, it is your Ontario Realty Corp., it is your Ministry of Children and Youth Services. I want the government to commit today to resolve the crisis that they have created at the Treasure Island Daycare Centre in Orillia. People should not be suffering for the mistakes made by this government.

SEVERANCE PAYMENTS

Mr. Paul Miller: On Saturday, I participated in a Hamilton rally to protest the inaction of the federal and provincial governments in the face of layoffs and the current economic crisis. The rally saw 2,000 people meet at the convention centre and march through downtown to the federal building.

It is unacceptable that the McGuinty government does nothing while thousands of Ontarians lose their jobs. Many people at the rally were former Stelco-US Steel workers who are now unsure of how they will manage to pay for their mortgages and how they will afford to send their kids to college.

Similarly, laid-off workers in Windsor had a rally last week to demand payment of their vacation and severance pay. They have still only been guaranteed a fraction of what they are owed—and they had to actually occupy the plant to get attention.

The government should listen to the demands of these workers. They need an immediate influx of stimulus for infrastructure projects in Hamilton and Windsor and many other areas of Ontario. They need the government to stop the erosion of our base industries.

Ontario workers deserve Bill 6, to protect the vacation and severance pay that they have worked long and hard over the course of a lifetime to earn.

As Saturday's rally showed, workers from across the province are demanding legislation to protect them. It is time for this government to start listening.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Applause.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Rick Johnson: Ontarians know that education is a key builder of both strong citizens and a strong economy. That's why it gives me great pleasure, as the former chair of the Trillium Lakelands District School Board in the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, to stand in appreciation of this government's dedication to our children's future.

The McGuinty Liberals are committed to ensuring that all students have the opportunity to reach their full potential. I have seen this commitment first-hand in our schools and in my community.

We have been working hard for Ontario's students, and the results are already showing. Overall education

funding has increased by almost 32% to the school boards that collectively serve my riding. This means more money for special education, transportation services and language programs.

We have hired more primary school teachers, more library staff and additional educational support staff, reducing class sizes and ensuring that each student gets the attention and resources needed to succeed.

Funding through our safe schools strategy is helping to provide a safe learning environment for all students in my riding. Our community use of schools funding also provides an opportunity for all students to participate in after-school programs and build essential life skills.

These funding initiatives underscore the McGuinty Liberals' commitment to the educational success of Ontario's students. I applaud these initiatives and will continue to work hard to ensure that education in this province is the best that it can be.

DEADSTOCK INDUSTRY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: The Minister of Agriculture has created a health and environmental hazard that could have been avoided. Farmers rely on the companies which collect deadstock to ensure safe disposal of dead animals. BSE regulations made it more expensive to dispose of deadstock. These companies have relied on government support to continue dealing with the dead animals safely. But the Minister of Agriculture has cut the funding without putting a plan in place. She says there are new regulations, but now it turns out that they will not be ready until later this spring. In the meantime, farmers are stuck with dead cows they can't afford to dispose of.

Why would anybody destroy the old program before the new one is ready? Perhaps the minister needs to get out of Toronto and talk to those farmers, or start listening to the agriculture groups. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture said, and I quote: "The alternatives are dangerous and unacceptable to the farming industry and to the rest of society. We cannot allow dead and decaying animals to collect in out-of-sight locations, because of the dangers of disease and the attraction of wildlife." The Ontario Cattlemen's Association said: "We hope the ministry will continue to support the collectors. On-farm disposal is not our preferred option." The Dairy Farmers of Ontario said that on-farm disposal isn't practical and that the issue must be addressed.

In fact, it seems that the minister is the only one who doesn't know we have a problem. The McGuinty government must restore this funding in this week's budget to make sure that the problem doesn't become worse.

OAKVILLE PROVINCIAL ECONOMIC COUNCIL

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I rise in the House today to recognize a local group that I've recently created in my own community of Oakville. The Oakville Provincial Economic Council, whose membership is composed of business and community leaders from all across Oakville,

was created to discuss new ideas and best practices that are going to help to see our community through these challenging economic times.

I'm really fortunate to have such a wealth of talent in my local community of Oakville. I'd like to thank the following individuals who attended our first inaugural meeting. There was Tom Adams, who is a regional and town councillor; Aby Alameddine, chair of the board of directors for the chamber of commerce; and Mike Gallagher, the business manager of International Union of Operating Engineers Local 793. There was Gary Gregoris, who is the vice-president of land at Mattamy Homes; Sanjiv Joshi, branch manager at Scotiabank; Ken Nevar, executive vice-president of Cooper Construction; and Jill Birch, the vice-president of business development at Sheridan College.

I'd also like to extend a sincere thank you on behalf of all the members of the group to Premier McGuinty, who was able to join the meeting and listen to some of the group's ideas.

I'd like to thank all the participants who were able to join our first meeting. I look forward to meeting with them again on a regular basis. Rest assured that I'll be bringing their ideas and their concerns back to our government, and their input on the economic supports and programs we're providing, so that local voices in my community can be heard.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Ted Arnott: This government is leaking like a sieve. It is repeatedly defying our important parliamentary convention of budget secrecy. That's why I asked this morning whether the Premier condoned or authorized a serious breach of budget secrecy committed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The non-answer I received was meaningless and, indeed, disrespectful of all members of this House. Instead of showing courtesy for members of this Legislature, the Premier and the Minister of Municipal Affairs have shown utter indifference, both in their politically motivated budget leaks and their weak response to a very serious question this morning.

1310

But the leaks began almost three weeks ago, when the Minister of Finance broke the news to an elite Toronto audience that Ontario is facing a staggering \$18-billion deficit. Why did he bypass the elected members of this Legislature to break the news, and why, if he knew this number three weeks ago, did he delay the budget?

This government's cynical media manipulation just won't work. It won't work in this Legislature, which they seem content to ignore; it won't work with the news media, which can't be fooled; and it won't work with the public, which the government consistently underestimates.

I'm confident that Ontario will overcome the government's feeble economic record, but we need a serious budget that respects our traditions and our institutions.

What we don't need are more leaks, more manipulation and more contempt for this Legislature.

LEADING WOMEN, BUILDING COMMUNITIES AWARD

Mr. Phil McNeely: On March 12, I was joined in my riding by the Honourable Deb Matthews, Minister of Children and Youth Services and minister responsible for women's issues. Together, we presented seven community activists from Ottawa-Orléans with the Leading Women, Building Communities Award.

I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize the recipients:

—Christine Tremblay, the executive director of Arts Ottawa East, who has spearheaded the local arts council's efforts to bring the Orléans Shenkman Arts Centre to fruition. Our grand opening will be in June this year;

—Judith Cane, the president of Antara Financial Group, who never ceases to stay involved in our community. She's a past chair of the Orléans Chamber of Commerce, the president of the Women's Business Connection and much more;

—Sandra MacInnis, the former executive director of Team Ottawa-Orléans, our local socio-economic development agency, brought together all three levels of government to work together on Orléans' key issues;

—Sharon Lawrence and Pierrette Woods, the co-chairs of the Innes Re-zoning and Development Group, formed the IRDG to reach out to the community to form a consensus on the development of the Innes industrial park;

—Zybina Richards, the president of the Fallingbrook Community Association, has boosted community spirit through several events every year, including Canada Day, Summerfest and several other events that have benefited the community; and

—Janise Johnson, the chairwoman of the Team Ottawa-Orléans Health Working Group, has brought about real change to our community in regard to health care. Through her hard work, Orléans has a family health team.

I was proud to honour these seven outstanding women and thank them for their continuous contributions and dedication to our community.

DAVID BENNINGTON WEATHERHEAD

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It is with great pleasure that I rise to pay tribute to a former member of Parliament for the former riding of Scarborough West, Mr. David Bennington Weatherhead. Upon learning of Mr. Weatherhead's hospitalization, I paid him a visit at Providence Healthcare Hospital, where he was recuperating following surgery. He had recently turned 81 years young on February 19, 2009, and he is getting better every single day.

I just wanted to tell the House that Mr. Weatherhead was elected to the federal House of Commons on two separate occasions, in 1968 and again in 1980, as MP for

Scarborough West. He served as parliamentary secretary to the Minister of State for Urban Affairs and then, later on, as parliamentary secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Mr. Weatherhead also served as chair of the health, welfare and social affairs standing committee and was a member of other committees in the federal government. The greatest contributions of Mr. Weatherhead's tenure as committee chair include the passage of the Unemployment Insurance Act and the national medicare act of 1984.

Too often we forget that public service involves tremendous sacrifice by members of our public. Mr. Weatherhead is one of these individuals. He himself forward on several occasions during elections, got elected, made a difference and helped to make Scarborough and Ontario and Canada a better place. Our children need to know that the contributions of our former politicians matter, especially while they're still here in our midst.

I wish, on behalf of our government and all members of this House and the people of Scarborough, to express our deepest gratitude to former MP David Weatherhead and wish him a swift recovery.

NOWRUZ

Mr. Reza Moridi: This past Friday, March 20, at 7:44 a.m., marked the first day of Nowruz. Nowruz is a rich tradition followed by many countries and marks the first day of spring. Nowruz literally means "a new day." It is a celebration of the spring equinox.

Nowruz is widely celebrated in various central Asian countries, such as Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, the Republic of Azerbaijan and in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iraq and Syria. The Baha'is, Zoroastrians and Ismaili Shia Muslims, who trace their origin to Iran, also celebrate Nowruz.

Nowruz has been celebrated for at least 3,000 years. It is the rebirth of nature and can be easily celebrated by all people in the world. About 200,000 Ontarians from various ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds celebrate Nowruz each year.

Numerous celebrations were organized by the Iranian community throughout the GTA, which were attended by a few of my colleagues: Deputy Premier Smitherman, Minister Wynne, Minister Chan and MPP Zimmer and MPP Jaczek. I wish to thank all of my colleagues in this House again for passing my resolution last year proclaiming the first day of spring as Nowruz in Ontario. I would like to extend my warmest greetings and best wishes for a festive Nowruz.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ACCOUNTING PROFESSIONS ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009

SUR LES PROFESSIONS COMPTABLES

Mr. Bentley moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 158, An Act to repeal and replace the statutes governing The Certified General Accountants Association of Ontario, the Certified Management Accountants of Ontario and The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario / Projet de loi 158, Loi visant à abroger et à remplacer les lois régissant l'Association des comptables généraux accrédités de l'Ontario, les Comptables en management accrédités de l'Ontario et l'Institut des comptables agréés de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The minister for a short statement?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I am pleased to introduce legislation that would, if passed, help ensure greater public transparency for the accounting profession while providing their governing bodies with new powers to protect consumers.

Si le projet de loi est adopté, il modernisera et harmonisera la gouvernance des trois principaux organismes comptables dans la province : l'Institut des comptables agréés de l'Ontario, l'Association des comptables généraux accrédités de l'Ontario, et la Société des comptables en management de l'Ontario.

The bill would harmonize and modernize the governance of the three main accounting bodies in this province: the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario, the Certified General Accountants of Ontario and the Society of Management Accountants of Ontario, and I ask everyone to support the legislation.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion regarding committee membership.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that, pursuant to standing order 113(c), the following changes be made to the membership of the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills: Mr. Johnson is added.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Mike Colle: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario entitled Fairness for Ontario Workers.

"Whereas the federal government's employment insurance surplus now stands at \$54 billion; and

"Whereas over 75% of Ontario's unemployed are not eligible for employment insurance because of Ottawa's unfair eligibility rules; and

"Whereas an Ontario worker has to work more weeks to qualify and receives fewer weeks of benefits than other Canadian unemployed workers; and

"Whereas the average Ontario unemployed worker gets \$4,000 less in EI benefits than unemployed workers in other provinces and thus ... not qualifying for many retraining programs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to press the federal government to reform the employment insurance program and to end the discrimination and unfairness towards Ontario's unemployed workers."

I sign this petition, along with thousands of other Ontario workers.

SALES TAX

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with the auto industry and it reads:

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the auto industry in Ontario and throughout North America is experiencing a major restructuring; and

"Whereas the current economic crisis is affecting the auto manufacturers and the front-line dealerships throughout Ontario; and

"Whereas many potential automobile purchasers are having difficulty accessing credit even at current prices; and

"Whereas a three-month tax holiday of the PST on the purchase of new cars and trucks would stimulate auto sales;

"Now, therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario implements a three-month PST tax holiday on new vehicle purchases, and that the Ontario Minister of Finance include this PST holiday in the next provincial budget."

I support this petition.

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PROPERTY TAXATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition signed by the people in Nickel Belt and Sudbury, and it goes as follows:

"Whereas 2009 is a reassessment year in the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas the assessments will be phased in over a four-year period from 2009 to 2012; and

"Whereas the assessed values for current value assessments collected as of January 1, 2008, were obtained during years of high real estate activity in the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas the downturn in the current global economic climate has greatly affected the real estate market, and subsequently, the assessed values in the province of Ontario;"

They ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Finance for the province of Ontario roll back assessed values to the base year of January 1, 2005."

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk with page Olivia.

ROUTE 17

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Une pétition à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que la route 17/174 a besoin d'être élargie à quatre voies, du chemin Trim à la route régionale Prescott-Russell 8 afin d'améliorer la sécurité routière;

« Attendu que la route 17/174 a été reconnue par le passé pour sa condition dangereuse ainsi que le taux d'accidents annuel notable;

« Attendu que cette route représente la principale voie d'accès à la capitale nationale pour la population ouvrière de Clarence-Rockland, Alfred et Plantagenet et Hawkesbury;

« Attendu que les comtés unis de Prescott-Russell ont manifesté leur intérêt à effectuer une étude environnementale destinée à l'agrandissement de la route 17/174 en passant une résolution au conseil;

« Attendu que la ville d'Ottawa a passé une résolution au conseil demandant soit à la province ou aux comtés unis de Prescott-Russell de prendre l'initiative de l'étude environnementale pour la route 17/174;

« Attendu que le gouvernement fédéral et le gouvernement provincial se sont tous deux engagés à fournir 40 \$ millions pour l'élargissement de la route 17/174;

« Nous, soussignés, adressons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario la pétition suivante :

« Nous demandons que les fonds nécessaires soient alloués aux comtés unis de Prescott-Russell afin de réaliser l'évaluation environnementale obligatoire à l'élargissement de la route 17/174 de deux à quatre voies, du chemin Trim à la route régionale Prescott-Russell 8. »

J'y ajoute ma signature.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Robert Bailey: I have a number of petitions here, 10,600 and some, actually, from the Save Our Sydenham Committee, addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the citizens of the area serviced by the Sydenham District Hospital, which includes Wallaceburg, Walpole Island, Dresden, Port Lambton and surrounding rural areas, have been advised by the Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network that Hay Group Health Care Consulting has recommended the closing of the emergency department in Wallaceburg..., and;

"Whereas the citizens repeatedly hear from the CEO of the Erie St. Clair LHIN that (1) it is only a recommendation; (2) that the recommendation is not about money; (3) that the LHIN is engaged in community

consultations; and (4) that no decision has been made; and

“Whereas the Chatham–Kent Health Alliance commissioned a study which clearly reported that the CKHA is in a deficit position. One way to save money is to close the Wallaceburg ER and realign the ... beds to Chatham. This report was made public on January 28, 2009, which was exactly five days after the Hay report; and

“Whereas the CKHA has undermined all efforts to keep the emergency department in Wallaceburg open. Sydenham Campus Hospital physicians and nurses have been advised ... that the entire medical floor will be closed and some beds will realign to Chatham hospital as of July 27, 2009...;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To take the necessary steps to ensure that the emergency department of the Sydenham Campus Hospital in Wallaceburg remain open and continue to operate as a full emergency department, and to direct the Erie St. Clair LHIN to re-examine CKHA operational budget and sufficiently fund the CKHA in order to keep” this hospital campus open.

I agree with the petition and add my name.

PROTECTION FOR MINERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the people of Mattawa.

“Whereas the current legislation contained in the Ontario health and safety act and regulations for mines and mining plants does not adequately protect the lives of miners, we request revisions to the act;

“Lyle Everett Defoe and the scoop tram he was operating fell 150 feet down an open stope (July 23, 2007). Lyle was 25 years and 15 days old when he was killed at Xstrata Kidd Creek mine site, Timmins.

“Section R-60 (page 60 of Mining Regulations) ... states that, ‘A shaft, raise or other opening in an underground mine shall be securely fenced, covered or otherwise guarded.... The stope where Lyle was killed was protected by a length of orange plastic snow fence and a rope with a warning sign. These barriers would not have been visible if the bucket of the scoop tram was raised. Lyle’s body was recovered from behind the scoop tram.

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Concrete berms must be mandatory to protect all open stopes and raises;

“All miners and contractors working underground must have working communication devices and personal locators;

“All equipment involved in injuries and fatalities must be recovered and examined unless such recovery would endanger the lives of others; and

“The entire act must be reviewed and amended to better protect underground workers.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the clerks with Emily.

PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY FRANCHISE

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I’ve got a petition today from people from Nanticoke, Hamilton, Binbrook and Ancaster, and it reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment has the highest average ticket revenue per game in the National Hockey League; and

“Whereas the Toronto Maple Leafs are ranked the most financially valuable team in the NHL; and

“Whereas many Hamilton and greater Toronto area hockey fans are unable to attend professional hockey games due to a lack of adequate ticket supply; and

“Whereas the Hamilton and greater Toronto area boast the biggest and best market in the world for hockey fans, with Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment bringing approximately \$2.4 billion to the local economy over 10 years; and

“Whereas a new franchise in the Hamilton and greater Toronto area is valued at \$600 million by some economists; and

“Whereas competition in both business and sports is healthy for both the Hamilton and greater Toronto area economy and sports team performance; and

“Whereas despite having the most loyal fans in the world, the Toronto Maple Leafs have not won the Stanley Cup in over 40 years; and

“Whereas Hamilton and greater Toronto area fans deserve competitive professional hockey teams;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To request that the government of the province of Ontario express its strong support to the board of governors of the National Hockey League for the relocation or expansion of a second NHL hockey team in the Hamilton and greater Toronto area in order to realize the economic advantages to the taxpayers of the province of Ontario and to provide healthy competition to the existing Toronto NHL franchise.”

As a season ticket holder, I agree with this and will affix my name thereto and send it to you with Everett.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance; and

“Whereas the removal of the temporary care assistance could mean that children will be forced into foster care; and

“Whereas the temporary care assistance amounted to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would receive to look after the same children if they were forced into foster care;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse the decision

to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren.”

I support this petition and am proud to affix my name to it and give it to page Megan.

1330

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and grandparents, as requested in Bill 33, put forward by MPP Kim Craiton.

“Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant’s willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and grandparents.”

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with the Burk’s Falls health centre.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Burk’s Falls health centre provides vital health services for residents of Burk’s Falls and the Almaguin Highlands of all ages, as well as seasonal residents and tourists; and

“Whereas the health centre helps to reduce demand on the Huntsville hospital emergency room; and

“Whereas the operating budget for MAHC”—Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare—“is insufficient to meet the growing demand for service in the communities of Muskoka—East Parry Sound; and

“Whereas budget pressures could jeopardize continued operation of the Burk’s Falls health centre;

“Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the McGuinty government and Minister of Health provide adequate increases in the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to maintain current health services, including those provided by the Burk’s Falls health centre.”

I support this petition.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas there are a growing number of drive-by shootings and gun crimes in our communities; and

“Whereas only police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are allowed to possess handguns; and

“Whereas a growing number of illegal handguns are transported, smuggled and being found in cars driven in our communities; and

“Whereas impounding cars and suspending driver’s licences of persons possessing illegal guns on the spot by police would make our communities safer;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56 ... entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law so that we can reduce the number of drive-by shootings and gun crimes in our communities.”

I support this petition and affix my name to it.

ASSISTANCE TO THE DISABLED

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, on October 30, 2008, unanimously passed Wellington—Halton Hills MPP Ted Arnott’s resolution, which called on the provincial government to add attendant services to the provincial wait times strategy and to allocate funding according to how many individuals actually require services; and

“Whereas the Ontario Community Support Association has long advocated for these steps; and

“Whereas some disabled Ontarians remain on waiting lists of four to 10 years for necessary attendant services; and

“Whereas Ontarians with disabilities would have so much more to contribute to their communities and their province if they had the attendant services they require;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allocate the necessary resources in the 2009-10 provincial budget to provide full and timely access to attendant care services.”

This is signed by literally hundreds of Ontario residents. I, of course, support it as well and will affix my signature to it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT
(KEEPING OUR KIDS SAFE
AT SCHOOL), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR L’ÉDUCATION
(SÉCURITÉ DE NOS ENFANTS
À L’ÉCOLE)

Ms. Wynne moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 157, An Act to amend the Education Act / Projet de loi 157, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l’éducation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Ms. Wynne?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member for Guelph. I just want to say at the outset that she has been very instrumental in bringing issues of school safety to the floor, has led the safe schools action team and has demonstrated the power of bringing together a group of people who are familiar with an issue and who can then recommend to government the next steps that provide for good policy-making. Thank you very much to her.

We know that even one incident of bullying or harassment in our schools is disheartening and is too many. I know that this is an issue that really transcends party lines. I'm looking forward to members of the opposition being supportive of this legislation that will, I believe, take another step towards making our schools safer.

Nous savons que ces incidents peuvent avoir un impact durable sur le bien-être des jeunes concernés et de leur famille. Il est évident que nous devons agir, et dès maintenant.

Our schools must be places where everyone—staff, students, parents and the community—feels welcome, safe and respected. Students need to feel safe and comfortable at school so that they can focus on learning. This is, in absolute terms, an issue of keeping kids safe at school and making sure that they are physically, emotionally and socially safe. But it's also about their achievement, because if students don't feel safe, if they don't feel respected and comfortable, and that they belong, then their learning will not be facilitated. If we're going to keep moving forward as a province in terms of our excellent education system, then we're going to have to make sure that our kids feel that safety at school.

In order to move forward, we have committed to, and stay committed to, the goals of increasing student achievement, of closing the gaps between kids who are achieving and kids who aren't, and of increasing public confidence in our publicly funded education system. These goals have not changed, and because they have not changed, we remain committed to helping all kids reach their potential.

As I said, the safe schools action team has demonstrated extraordinary leadership in moving us forward on this agenda. I want to thank all of the members of that team. I noted Liz Sandals, who's the member for Guelph; my colleague Leeanna Pendergast was also part of that team; and also members of the action team: Stu Auty, Dr. Inez Elliston, Ray Hughes, Dr. Debra Pepler and Lynn Ziraldo.

All of these folks helped us to come up with the steps that we need to take in order to make our schools safer. They looked specifically at gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour. Those issues, as we know, are very difficult ones. The action team's findings were sobering. They heard some positive stories of schools working with community agencies and students being supported, but they also heard too many stories of students feeling un-

welcome and unsafe at school. So there are actions that we all need to take.

Everyone has a role to play. Government has a role to play. School boards have a role to play—schools, parents, students and community agencies. The only way that we will ensure safety for all of our students at school is if all of those people involved in students' lives take responsibility and work together.

I want to make it clear that in introducing this legislation, I am in no way suggesting that there is one piece of legislation or one action that government alone can take to right any wrong that is happening in our school system. It is imperative that we find ways to work together, and that's indeed what the safe schools action team said. Creating and maintaining a positive school climate is a critical condition if we want our kids to learn and to achieve, but there are no simple or simplistic answers to that creation of a positive school climate. This legislation is one part of making that positive school climate a reality in every school in the province. Remember, we are talking about in the order of 5,000 publicly funded schools in this province. It is a huge endeavour.

We've done a lot, and a recent study by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health revealed that, indeed, we are on the right track. What they found is that nearly 93% of students reported feeling safe in their school. So the reality is that the vast majority of kids do feel safe in their schools, feel that there are people they can talk to and feel that they belong. But we can't rest as a government and we can't rest as a society until every single student has that same sense of security.

The Keeping Our Kids Safe at School Act, Bill 157, is an important step. This proposed legislation was introduced two weeks ago. If passed, as I said then, this legislation would require school staff to report to the principal any incidents when students could be suspended or expelled.

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The Education Act already explains when student suspension and expulsion must be considered by the principal for activities such as bullying or assault. Principals can't act on the behaviours if they don't know they're happening. So it's important that staff be required to report to principals.

Now, we know that school staff in Ontario are committed to student safety. This legislation would indeed help to clarify the role of all school staff in reporting serious incidents to the principal. I just want to be clear that these changes will formalize what already takes place in the province, what is already common practice. But I've spoken in this Legislature many times about having asked the safe schools action team to look at where there might be legislative gaps. This is one of the gaps they found, and so we are putting this legislation in place. I don't want to imply that that kind of reporting of staff to principals is not already happening; it is common practice.

The policy requirement already exists for principals to report specified violent incidents to the police; that's

already in place. Students should feel comfortable reporting incidents to staff, knowing they'll be followed up on. Parents should also feel comfortable, knowing that these incidents will be responded to appropriately.

What this legislation would also require is that principals contact the parents of victims of student incidents in those cases when suspension or expulsion can be considered. We know that parents have a right to know when a child is a victim of such behaviour. This legislation fills another gap where principals have, until now, been required to report to the parents of the perpetrators of these serious incidents, but there hasn't been the equivalent requirement for the parents of victims.

I would just say that the legislation would require that reporting to the parents of victims, except in cases when it would cause the student harm to do so. I think we have to recognize that there is a need for principals to have the discretion, when there is a situation where they think that reporting to the parents of a victim could in fact worsen the child's situation, not to do that. That is entirely consistent with our belief and our contention that our principals in all our schools are very responsible leaders. We want to make sure there is a clear definition of the requirement, which is to report to parents of victims, but that there is the notion that if there is potential harm, principals have the discretion to make that decision.

If passed, this legislation will be the first in Canada requiring school staff to report serious student incidents to the principal and requiring principals to notify parents of victims. We're taking a leadership role in making clear what everyone's responsibility is.

Finally, the legislation would require staff to intervene to address inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour among students—such as racist or sexist comments—that is unacceptable in our schools. We'd only require staff to intervene if it was safe to do so, and I think that is consistent with what we've heard from the community and certainly from teachers.

Again, I would just say that this would put into legislation what we know is already common practice in the vast majority of our schools. What it may mean is asking a student to stop the behaviour, identifying the type of behaviour and why it's inappropriate and/or disrespectful, and asking the student for a change in future. We know that teachers in our schools do this every single day. What we're clarifying here is that it's an expectation that there would be that kind of intervention.

We know that this legislation is just part of the solution, and I have said that. We're moving ahead in many other areas, based on the action team's recommendations. The team recommended changes around the curriculum. They heard from participants that the school curriculum is one of the most effective ways for students to learn about healthy and respectful relationships. It's important to note that the safe schools action team, in conversation with me, made it clear that we need to find ways to support teachers and the school to focus on the discussion around what healthy relationships are. That's something that can be done within the school and also in connection

with other partners in the community, such as public health, to make sure we have the information and the resources in the schools to support teachers in that discussion with students. Again, these are not always easy conversations, so we need to make sure that our teachers have the support they need. We're moving ahead on those changes around the curriculum.

They also heard from participants that we needed to be sure that organizations work together.

En effet, l'équipe d'action avait eu vent de cas de bonne collaboration entre des écoles et des organismes communautaires. Ces organismes peuvent faire bénéficier le personnel scolaire de leur expertise pour soutenir les élèves et leur famille face aux problèmes complexes et souvent délicats. Les recommandations reflètent la nécessité de maintenir et de renforcer ces partenariats.

At the ministry, in fact, we're already providing support to school boards, through the student support leadership initiative, to help build partnerships with community agencies, including ones that provide mental health services to children and youth.

The student support leadership initiative is consistent with our belief and our actions within the Ministry of Education and across ministries that say that if we put children, our students, at the centre of a circle of care and we make sure that all of the adults involved with the student's life are talking to one another, then we are going to see better results for that student, whether those are social/psychological/emotional results or whether they are academic results. We need to make sure that in every board in every community, that collaboration is happening, so we've put money into the system to help to build those partnerships. Those networks are extremely important.

The action team also made some recommendations around data collection. They heard that sometimes schools don't know the extent to which the types of behaviours they were concerned about are occurring and how often they are occurring. The team recommended that the ministry expand its school climate surveys so that we could get information from those affected. Those anonymous surveys will help to gather that data. We're working to expand the existing school climate surveys. That's already happening; that work is under way.

As well, the ministry will be expanding the online bullying prevention registry to include resources that promote safe and inclusive schools. Before we came into office, those resources were not available in any systematic way to schools in the province. We've made them available, and we're going to be expanding that. We're going to be providing \$4 million for resources, training or activities that help promote safe, equitable and inclusive schools.

There may be questions about the need for training. What we need to make sure of is that everyone is on the same page. When I say "training," it is as much about making sure, if the new legislation is passed, that everyone is aware of what the expectations are and that everyone within school communities can find ways to

work better together in that new context. This work is really key to providing and promoting positive school culture and healthy and safe relationships.

The other issue is to make sure that we engage students. We have to be sure that through student councils, student-led clubs like gay-straight alliances, and opportunities for leadership, students can be a central part of the solution. We all know, from having been in high school, that students, especially in high schools and middle schools, need to be part of the solution. Programs like the Parents Reaching Out grants and the Student Voice project are already working to engage parents and students in that process.

And we're not finished. The action team made a number of other valuable recommendations in December in areas like collaboration with local police, prevention work and further training. We'll continue to provide a comprehensive response to the report.

It's an ongoing work. I think that if I were to stand here and say that the legislation we have introduced is the end of the journey and that if that legislation passes, we will have done everything we can do to make our schools safe, then everyone in and outside of this chamber would know that I was not being fully truthful. What I need to say to you and to the folks who are very concerned about this, which is every parent in the province, is that this is an ongoing journey. This is something that we have to be vigilant about, as parents, as legislators, as teachers and principals and support staff in all of our schools. Together we will find the solutions. We will find ways to make kids safer.

This legislation is part of that solution, but it is much broader. There are no simplistic answers here. We have to be vigilant. We have to continue to work together to make sure that our communities have the resources they need and that our staff have the clear understanding of what the expectations are. If we can do that, that will take us one step closer to making our schools as safe and secure as they can be.

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I look forward to working with the school communities to ensure that that is the case. I also look forward to the support of the Legislature on this legislation, because it is an important step towards that safer and more secure school community setting.

I'd like to share the rest of my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Guelph. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The Chair recognizes the member for Guelph.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm delighted to be able to rise in the House today to support second reading of the Keeping Our Kids Safe at School Act and perhaps to provide context of how the act fits into the work of the safe schools action team.

I realize the time for introductions has passed, but I'm delighted to note that we have a lot of members of the retired teacher organization from Hamilton, Wentworth and Haldimand, I believe it is, in the gallery with us today, who just happened to be here for lunch. It's great

that they can drop in on an education debate. So welcome to those folks.

There are few things more important than the health, safety and well-being of our young people. Students must feel safe and welcome at school so that they can focus on learning. A safe learning environment is essential to their well-being and success at school. As part of our safe schools strategy, this bill will be one more step towards ensuring just that. Sadly, we know that there are young people who do not feel safe and welcome at school, and that is unacceptable to us.

Last year, Minister of Education Kathleen Wynne re-engaged the safe schools action team. I'm proud to have chaired that team, and it has been a real privilege to work with the folks who are members of that team. I'd like the people who are listening in on the debate this afternoon to understand that the safe schools action team is not a travelling gaggle of politicians, if you will. I'm obviously a politician. My colleague Leeanna Pendergast from Kitchener-Conestoga is also on the team, but she was a vice-principal of a secondary school before she became an MPP.

The other members of the team: Stu Auty, president of the Canadian Safe School Network; Ray Hughes, who has worked in the area of teaching students about healthy relationships out of the Centre for Prevention Science at CAMH in London; Lynn Ziraldo, who has a huge amount of experience with special education issues; Deb Pepler, who is one of the pre-eminent researchers on bullying in Canada and works with York University and the Hospital for Sick Children; and Inez Elliston, who has a host of experience working with race relation issues and is herself a retired educator. I just want to emphasize that these were people who had professional qualifications to look at the issues that we were dealing with and brought a wealth of experience to the table with them.

The minister asked us this time out to address issues of student-to-student gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour in schools. We also looked at barriers students faced to reporting these issues and reporting requirements for school staff. We participated in a review of local school board police protocols. We presented our final report to the minister in December. The report recommends actions that can be taken by government, by school boards and by school staff to make a difference for our students.

During our consultations, we met with people all across the province, including students, school staff, parents, police, community agencies and other members of the school community. I want to share with you some of the things that we heard during those discussions. We heard the statistics. A recent report from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in London states that the rate of sexual harassment in schools are significant. Some 36% of boys and 46% of girls in grade 9 reported that someone made unwanted sexual comments, jokes or gestures at them. The same study showed that 38% of

grade 9 boys and 26% of grade 9 females have used homophobic insults against other students. A third of both grade 9 boys and grade 11 boys have been victims of homophobic slurs. And we heard that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth have one of the highest rates of suicide. In fact, it was the police that talked about that, and of course it's the police that are called on to investigate.

Clearly, these statistics are unacceptable. Bullying and harassment can make students feel that they do not want to come to school. It can affect their health, mental well-being and school success, because as teachers know, time on task is a determinant of how well you do at school, and if you don't come to school, you can't succeed at school. So it's important that all our young people want to come to school and want to be engaged in what's happening at school. Incidents like these can have long-lasting effects on the students involved, their families and the school community; they are unacceptable in our communities, and they are unacceptable in our schools.

More moving than the statistics were the individual stories we heard, many from the students themselves. The stories were difficult to hear, and I'm sure that they were not easy to tell, but the students, the courage that they showed and the insightful feedback we received from all of the consultation participants helped us to shape strong recommendations.

We heard from and about students who feel that school is not a place where they feel welcome. We heard stories of bullying, harassment and even violence directed at students. Some students feel isolated, invisible and all-too-often victimized to the extent that they are not only disengaging from their studies, but they are completely leaving school and in many cases even the community in which they live. One student told us that it is easy to withdraw if you don't feel like you fit in anyway. Some gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students told us they left their home communities and ended up living on the streets in Toronto hoping to find connection, compassion and service. This is not the future we want for our young people.

It was interesting to me that in one group of students we spoke with who were attending the alternative school here in Toronto that the Toronto District School Board runs for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth, I don't think any of them actually came from Toronto; every one of them had come from somewhere else. They'd either been disconnected from their school, sometimes they'd been thrown out of the family home, but every one of them had had to leave the school to which they had been assigned—clearly not the way that we want our schools to run.

Our schools should be able to provide an environment where all young people feel welcome and safe so that they can focus on learning. We have heard from students who have found that environment. I mentioned the alternative program here in Toronto, but there are many other settings in schools around the province where staff and community have worked to make supportive

environments, both for students who—I've been talking about students who are gay and lesbian, but also students who have been bullied. We found many positive stories where schools are working to create that positive environment, and once students feel safe and welcome, then they can re-engage in school and succeed, which is what we want them to be able to do.

That is the good news in this, that there are things we can do to improve the situation. There are actions we can take to help make our schools safer and prevent these types of behaviours.

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We heard about initiatives in schools that are helping. We heard about communities coming together. We heard about the resources that community agencies can provide, because in many cases there are agencies in the community that are equipped to provide support to students who are struggling, and they just need to be invited into our schools to work in partnership to make sure that students can take full advantage of the resources that are in the community, but of which the students may be unaware.

We heard that sometimes solutions can be simple, that something is better than nothing—a rainbow poster in a school that identifies a safe place to come, such as a gay-straight alliance where students can talk about the issues that concern them; an adult intervening when disrespectful or discriminatory language is used.

We heard directly from the young people that they notice; they notice action and they notice inaction. In the words of one student, "If the teachers don't call us out when they hear something happening that is wrong, then we assume it's okay." Over and over, we would hear this from the students: "If you don't correct us when we misbehave, the assumption is that the behaviour is permitted." Hence, in the legislation that we are debating this afternoon, intervention will be required.

We know that the majority of school staff already intervene. It's important to understand that in many, many schools, the staff do routinely intervene when they come across misbehaviour or disrespectful behaviour. But we want to make sure that that is the situation in every school, so we will be requiring intervention on the part of school staff when they run across disrespect and misbehaviour.

We have made a number of other recommendations. The report recommends actions that can be taken by government, boards and school staff to make a difference, but we know that there is no one simple solution. But I'm certain that with the proposed legislation, we will improve the situation. I think the one thing that we want everyone to understand is that everyone is part of the solution: As adults, we have a role to play; as government, we have a role to play; as the school board and the school administrators, we have a role to play; school staff have a role to play; and students have a role to play. Everyone has a role to play in making a safe, positive and healthy learning climate in schools.

I mentioned that this was the third report of the safe schools action team, and I'd like to give you a little bit of

the background of the other two reports. The first time out we worked on the issue of bullying prevention, and the second time out we provided a review of the former safe schools legislation. Those two previous reports have led us along the path to creating safer schools. First of all, the bullying prevention work: The action team was first appointed in 2004 to advise on the development of a comprehensive, province-wide approach to bullying prevention in Ontario schools. We consulted with students, school staff, parents, and community agencies and organizations about bullying, about reporting procedures, about the serious nature of the problem.

We presented our first report in November 2005. It was titled, *Shaping Safer Schools: A Bullying Prevention Action Plan*. As a result of that first round of consultations, we recommended procedures to allow students to report bullying incidents safely and in a way that would minimize the possibility of reprisal—because we know that is real. Following our recommendations, the government has produced a pamphlet for parents on bullying that is now available in 22 different languages and which has been very well received. It helps parents understand what to look for and where to go for help.

The government also introduced the online registry of bullying prevention programs.

Bill 212 added bullying to the list of misbehaviours for which suspension must be considered.

Our partnership with Kids Help Phone supports their work in providing anonymous support to children and young people who have issues that they want to discuss with somebody who can help them.

This team was engaged again in late 2005 to review the safe schools provisions of the Education Act. Through our many discussions with parents, educators, students and other community members, we heard that there needed to be more consistency, more fairness, a progressive approach to discipline, and more preventive measures. We listened. Those discussions led to Bill 212 and the changes that came into effect in February just over a year ago; changes that better combine discipline with opportunities for students to keep learning. We have moved toward a progressive discipline approach that allows for the most appropriate consequence to be considered in each case of inappropriate student behaviour. The changes also include more support for students who are on long-term suspension or who have been expelled and more efforts to help prevent inappropriate behaviour.

Schools and boards across the province are implementing innovative and exciting new programs to help get students back on track with their learning. I've been very pleased, as I travel around the province for one reason or another, to have people approach me and say, "Oh, I want to tell you about the new alternative program that we set up." I'm finding that educators are very, very excited to be able to offer alternative programs in boards all across the province. Prior to Bill 212, there were only 12 alternative programs set up by the previous government in the entire province. Now there are alternative programs in every single school board.

We've also put more resources into the system to help make prevention and counselling happen. We are helping boards fund more psychologists, more social workers, more child and youth workers, more attendants, counsellors and other non-teaching professionals. These are people we know need to be in the system, working alongside teachers, principals, other support staff and parents to offer students the additional support they may need.

We are also encouraging boards to build partnerships with community agencies like child and family services. In fact, we have provided funding to seed those local partnerships: getting the boards together with the community agencies that can support children in each region of the province. At the board and school level, I know there has been a lot of work to put these changes into place. This is the kind of coordinated, whole-community approach that will make these changes work for our students.

We are also investing in programs like the focus on youth program and the community use of schools program, which promote participation in community activities and help establish our schools as community hubs. We are providing \$10 million to 33 select high schools located in urban areas that face challenges such as poverty, criminal and gang activity, and a lack of community resources. This funding will help provide needed supports for students and their families, such as after-school recreational programs and peer mentoring opportunities.

Over the past five years, we have put more resources into the system to help prevent bullying, support students at risk and make our schools safer. We will continue to work closely with school boards, schools and our education partners as we work to implement these changes. Everyone should feel that they are welcome, an inclusive part of our publicly funded education system. We want to build a climate where everyone understands that each one of us is responsible for helping to maintain that positive school climate.

We are not shirking our responsibility. We are taking action.

I'm delighted to be able to support Bill 157.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Let me say from the outset that this bill would not be coming forward to this Legislature at this time—it would be languishing on the backburner somewhere—if it hadn't been for the excellent advocacy work done by my colleague the member from Burlington with respect to the many complaints that she heard personally from people across the province of Ontario about their experience with the school system and their children who had been exposed to abuse at school.

We would have been happy to say that we would support this wholeheartedly, even at that, if the bill had actually been a true mandatory reporting bill, but, of

course, it isn't. The only mandatory reporting here is from the teacher to the principal. The principal then has absolute discretion about whether to proceed with it or not.

I would draw your attention to section 300.3, which says that "if the principal ... believes that a pupil of the school has been harmed as a result of an activity described" in subsections that prohibit that activity, then they shall notify the parents within a reasonable time. With all due respect, that's putting a really onerous burden on the principals and the schools to have to determine whether or not a child has been abused or has been harmed. In a situation where there may have been physical abuse, that may be readily apparent, but what about a situation where there has been psychological abuse? Is the principal really to be put in that position, as to make that determination to whether the parents should be notified or not?

Shouldn't it be required that all incidents of abuse, whatever nature, be reported to the parents, and the parents can then take whatever decision is necessary thereafter for their children? They know them best, after all. They are the ones who are required to be caring for their child and to make sure that their needs are being met. Shouldn't there be a mandatory requirement to report that to the parents for them to make a determination about what they want to do?

The other thing I would like to point out is that even if the principal is advised that there has been harm to a child, if they believe that there's going to be harm to that child by the parent or the guardian, the principal doesn't have to report it to them, but there's no indication as to who they report it to. Surely, there must be a requirement to report it to children's aid or to the police. Thank you. I'm sure my colleague will have more to say on that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'll have an opportunity to speak to the bill in approximately one hour, but I do have a couple of questions of the minister.

One of the things this bill does is to clarify the role of all school staff as it relates to the idea of mandatory reporting. I'm assuming that includes cafeteria workers, social workers, police officers now—because they're hired in the schools, and presumably they're staff too; I'm not quite sure—secretaries and all that. I'm assuming these people are either trained or will be trained, because this is not an easy job to do. Based on what kinds of incidents we are going to be reporting, this is not going to be easy—one question.

The other question is, this requires staff to intervene where safe—I don't know how you determine that, but teachers are required to intervene when it's safe—on matters related to issues of racism and the like. The minister said that all teachers, or most teachers, were doing that in the past, and now they will be required to be doing it. I'm not quite sure—if they're all doing it, why are we requiring them to do it? And if so, are there any legal implications of requiring them now to do something

that in the past they would have been doing as a matter of duty of a teacher to try to solve a problem—where it may not be safe, by the way. Are there any legal implications in what you're requiring them to do?

Third, you talked about how you must engage students, but you didn't say exactly how you are going to do that. I agree with the idea, except the example you used was the Parents Reaching Out program, where there's \$3 million—I think that's what you said. If you've got some ideas, could you please share them?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Absolutely.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I am very glad to stand up and support Bill 157. First, I'd like to congratulate the Minister of Education, as well as the member from Guelph and all the participants who have brought this very important legislation here to the House today. The minister said that this is an ongoing journey, and I completely agree. It is a step in the right direction, and I congratulate her for that, because there really isn't anything more important than making sure that our children are safe in school.

Interjection.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: It's unfortunate that the member from Trinity-Spadina is heckling me while I want to talk about this very, very important issue.

If passed, Ontario would be the first province in Canada with legislation of this kind—that is important—making schools even safer and leading the way for its students to succeed.

I would like to take a moment to talk about some of our schools on Hamilton Mountain and to thank some of the principals, like George Gould, from Huntington Park, who knows about this legislation and is very glad we're finally bringing this to the House. I want to congratulate Randy Gallant, from Sherwood High, and Rick Hart, who as well is very, very happy to hear that the minister has brought this forward.

There are four key elements to this. The proposed legislation will require school staff to report serious student incidents such as bullying to the principal. It would require that principals contact the parents of victims. It will address the reporting gaps between the principals, teachers and parents about serious student incidents that would lead to suspension or expulsion.

I agree with this legislation and thank the minister for bringing it forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The member for Simcoe North.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise to make a few comments on second reading of Bill 157, as we do our leadoff speeches today. First of all, I want to thank the minister for bringing this bill forward. I know we are going to have a lot of debate on this bill, because some of the members on this side of the House feel there is a certain weakness to the bill. It may be the only one of its kind in Canada right now—I'm not sure about that; I

somehow don't believe that—however, I'm going to tell you that what I'm told is that the mandatory reporting doesn't go far enough.

My understanding is that the way it's worded now, it's mandatory for the teacher to report an incident to the principal, and that's where it can stop. A children's aid society, the police and parents are not really involved at that time. That is where I want to get clarification. I can tell you that we look forward to the committee hearings on this and we look forward to bringing in groups like the Ontario Principals' Council, the children's aid societies, the Toronto Police Association and the Police Association of Ontario. I think that all these folks should have a say in this, and I hope we can listen to their comments and that we can make the proper amendments to this legislation that would satisfy this side of the House. I look forward to the opportunity for the committee hearings.

I also look forward and thank my colleague from Burlington, the critic for education, who has done a lot of work on this bill and has brought to the attention of the House how important this type of legislation is. I hope we can listen to her comments and find out how to get this bill right, if we do have it finally passed.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Response?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you to all the members who have spoken. I just want to say a couple of things. First of all, to the member for Trinity–Spadina on the issue of training: Yes, that is what I talked about. Training will be provided. That is why we are putting money into the system to actually make sure that everybody understands what the expectations are.

On the issue of how we are engaging students, I said there is the parent engagement part, but there's also a student voice. What we're doing is engaging students in this conversation. There's a whole project for students that is parallel to the parent reaching out project. So there's actually money going into the system to help students engage in these kinds of activities.

I just want to speak to some of the comments by the members for Whitby–Oshawa and Simcoe North. I am prepared to recognize the advocacy of opposition members, but I need to be clear that the safe schools action team was already up and running and doing this work. We knew this was important work that had to be done.

The issue of the discretion of principals smacks to me of echoes of a previous government: simplistic solutions without nuance, without an understanding of how schools worked and without an understanding of how human relationships within schools worked, coming forward from this party suggesting that somehow the professionalism of principals was not enough to make sure they could make those decisions when there is a need to take into account the safety of students. So the issue of mandatory reporting to CAS or mandatory reporting to police is covered by other pieces of legislation. When it comes to principals reporting to the parents of victims—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Simcoe North.

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Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: If what I'm hearing from the party opposite is that they don't have the faith in principals, and principals shouldn't have discretion, I'm prepared and I'm open to listening to everyone who comes forward, because we, unlike the party opposite, will be having hearings on this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): You know, there is a way to debate around here. We're each given the opportunity to speak, and we should try to respect those who have the floor.

I will now call for further debate.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I really appreciate the opportunity to address this long-awaited piece of legislation, for which I have been advocating for over a year. I will be supporting the bill.

Applause.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: However, I feel there is an opportunity lost. Don't get so happy so fast.

The courageous victims supporting the need for mandatory reporting legislation are hoping and praying that this time, this government has finally gotten it right.

"As soon as she woke up in the morning, her heart filled with dread. 'Will they leave me alone today? If I wear this shirt, will they go easy on me? Is this the day they finally kill me?'" These are not the exaggerations of a dramatic teenager. This was Lindsay Hyde's daily existence for far too long. Daily, she would summon up every ounce of courage just to walk through the front doors of her school. Around every corner lurked the possibility that her tormenters would be lying in wait and this time they would kill her. That was the constant stress in her life. How is anyone expected to continue day after day under this amount of stress, let alone a teenager who is dealing with all the usual struggles of growing up? The teachers knew, the principal knew, yet Lindsay was left perfectly alone, totally exposed and unsafe in one of our Ontario schools because nobody protected her.

As parents, we have to accept that we can't protect our children from everything, but we can and we should expect that our children are kept safe and sound within the confines of our education system.

What if Lindsay had not had the courage to go to the public? What would have happened to her if she hadn't summoned up every ounce of courage to go to the media with her story? When Lindsay's story finally broke in the Toronto Sun and was posted online, within 24 hours there were 150 comments, comments from many people who had experienced similar situations. I call it our dirty little secret, as it exists in schools across this province. The administrators and the ministry are unwilling to admit it and to address it.

Minister, I want to hear the voices of the children. I want you to hear the voices of the children who have suffered this kind of abuse on your watch, in your schools.

While they were suffering, I was trying to be their voice in the Legislature. My pleas were falling on deaf ears. I know that it is through my colleagues' and my unrelenting pursuit of this issue that we have the opportunity to discuss this bill today. After years of PC caucus members standing in this Legislature and demanding mandatory reporting for student-on-student violence, the McGuinty government is finally listening.

The strength and fortitude of the families who have fought for years to see justice for their children and the protection of all students in Ontario cannot be forgotten. We must also praise the bravery of the children who suffered violence and abuse at the hands of their fellow students and had the courage to share their heart-wrenching stories. Daniel Sebben contemplated suicide because no one could protect him at school. Lindsay Hyde was terrified for her life because she could not escape her tormentors. It's high time for Mr. McGuinty to show some leadership and protect our students.

Since my colleagues and I have highlighted the need for mandatory reporting, students are coming out of the woodwork with their stories of abuse with little or no action from the authorities in their schools. This is a dark part of our education system that needs to be addressed. Our caucus and the parents of the victims want to see mandatory reporting that includes the notification of parents, the police and the Ministry of Education so that they can track these incidents and take appropriate action. It's clear that the creation of a safety plan is not enough to keep our students safe from their abusers. The ministry needs to establish clear-cut rules for the creation and the enforcement of safety plans following a report of an incident of violent abuse. It isn't just the incidents themselves that need to be dealt with. Will this government take action in regard to the administrators who have systematically failed children like Daniel Sebben and Lindsay Hyde and the countless other children who can't be named because of their age?

Parents should not have to fight for three years to get the minister's attention to keep their children safe from perpetrators on the government's watch. As parents, we need to know that the government is doing everything in their power to protect our children while they are in their care. Mr. McGuinty has let these parents down and has put these children at risk.

What adds insult to injury is that when the violence or abuse is discovered, no one in the school system, at the ministry, will accept any accountability, and at-risk students are left to fend for themselves. We are not asking that every incident in the playground be reported. This is not about a schoolyard spat. What we are asking for is that every serious incident of violence and abuse be reported to the parents and to the proper authorities and that an action plan be put in place immediately, but that it is also enforced. This has not happened in some incidents, but it must happen for the sake of all our students.

Will Mr. McGuinty also put a plan in place to deal with the abuser? Children who also need support should not be written off at such tender ages. Nine years of age is too young to be tarred with a brush as a sexual deviant. These students deserve counselling and support systems in place to resolve and monitor their issues now, or we will continue to see these children in our system in one form or another for the rest of their lives.

It is time for this government to get proactive about the future of these youth. Our students deserve a safe, secure learning environment from which to grow and flourish. The Premier has promised us this time and time again. It is now the time to deliver on that promise.

The McGuinty government is quite proud of their safe schools policies and investments, but, as usual, these are not action words. I can't find the substance. If there were, students like Daniel Sebben—the York region board was unable to do anything to protect him from his harassers, even when the abuse was witnessed by teachers, meaning that once again it is the victim who has to make all the accommodations including, in Daniel's case, paying for private counselling sessions. This is in Daniel's own words: "There's something in place for the aggressor but absolutely nothing for us. Why do we have to put out the money [for counselling] to get help?"

Well, Daniel is going to be heartily disappointed with you, Minister, as Bill 157 has no intention of mandating help for the victim, nor is it about to protect the victim. Minister, I do not know how you are going to look these families in the eyes who were hoping to see real change and real policy here. What you have done, in the words of your ministry's office, is "codify the grey areas."

The member from Kitchener-Conestoga stood in the House and proudly recited the McGuinty government's investment in safe schools, and she said that we have amended "the Education Act to include bullying as an infraction for which there are consequences; putting more adults in schools by hiring 170 psychologists, social workers, youth workers and attendance counsellors to work with at-risk students; and training front-line staff, by providing bullying-prevention training to 25,000 teachers and almost 7,500 principals and vice-principals to ensure an effective response."

Is there a part of Bill 157, Minister, that requires one of these 170 psychologists, social workers, youth workers and attendance counsellors to meet with the victim and to meet with the aggressor? I don't think so. Including that would create a well-rounded policy, and we know better than to expect that from you. This is a hush bill, pure and simple. In fact, Minister, I am surprised that you did not celebrate these new human resources in this bill, as you did in the Legislature time and time again.

1430

In November, you said:

"There are two million students who go to school in this province every day in 5,000 publicly funded schools. There is more money in this system to provide caring adults—whether it's teachers, social workers or psychologists—with \$43 million this year alone to increase

those supports.... I understand that there are difficult situations that" students "go through. But what this government will not do is cut loose a student who is struggling—whether that student is a victim or whether that student is a perpetrator. It is our responsibility, as the adults in government, as the adults in charge, to make sure that every student in our system has a chance to be a functioning citizen. If we don't pay now, we pay later. We need those kids functioning now."

Minister, Daniel Sebben had to pay for his therapy, as do countless children currently in therapy as a result of student-on-student violence and abuse in your schools. Where are these counsellors? This is yet another example of poor allocation of resources. If we are to believe that you have made these investments, then why can't you strategically direct them to where they're needed most? Clearly you indicate an understanding of the future repercussions of failing to address this situation at an early age. You must agree that there is a connection between bullying in elementary and secondary school, where no consequences are put in place, and later incidents of domestic and societal violence. In your own words, Minister, pay now or pay later.

Daniel contemplated suicide; it was that bad. His mother lobbied hard for him at every turn, to protect her son in a race to save his life. Minister, you have given his mother nothing. In fact, the York school board, where Daniel was a student, already has these policies in place.

In case it is reported that you have resolved miraculously this issue of mandatory reporting in Ontario, let me clarify for the record; let me share with you the existing policies in the York board, which are reflective of many board policies across Ontario.

Let me start with the role and mandate of York school board. The role and mandate of the board is set out in the Education Act, as amended from time to time, and in accompanying regulations. Specifically in regard to the provision of safe and secure schools, the school boards, principals, teachers and school staff are required to do the following:

"Comply with the requirements related to the duties of principals and teachers under the Education Act and regulations;

"Comply with the requirements legislated under the Child and Family Services Act (e.g., 'duty to report');

"Administer school-related disciplinary actions (e.g., suspensions and expulsions);

"Develop a code of conduct, as required under the Education Act...;

"Ensure that resources, (e.g. on drug awareness, on conflict resolution) are accessible to assist school staff in promoting crime prevention;

"Develop policies on how to respond to crises, including a media plan;

"Ensure that prevention and intervention strategies are available;

"Provide staff with opportunities for acquiring the skills necessary to promote safe school environments; and

"Develop an effective consultation mechanism for soliciting input from staff, students, parents and school councils in the development of local protocol."

It already exists. We didn't need Bill 157 to make that happen.

Let me go on to another part of their policy, on occurrences requiring police notification. "The following serious and/or violent incidents must be reported forthwith to the police:

"possession or use of weapons;

"physical assaults causing significant bodily harm or requiring medical attention;

"sexual offences;

"robbery;

"criminal harassment;

"hate- and/or bias-motivated incidents;

"gang-related incidents;

"extortion;

"threats of serious physical injury;

"possession or trafficking of drugs;

"possession or threat to use an incendiary device;

"vandalism;

"deaths on school property.

"It is recognized that board employees have a duty to determine whether an offence may have been committed and what the nature of that offence might be, prior to notifying the police. However, a board employee should conduct no investigation beyond what is required to make that preliminary determination to involve police." It's already happening; Bill 157 doesn't make it any stronger.

"School reporting procedures:

"Occurrences for which schools must contact the police"—must.

"When a principal or principal-designate has a reasonable basis to believe that a student or other person has committed one or more of the following serious and/or violent incidents as per section 6, the principal or principal-designate shall contact the York Regional Police ... forthwith.

"Reference should be made to section 13 of this protocol (Reporting of children suspected to be in need of protection)." Again, it's already happening.

I'll move on to "Occurrences for which schools may contact police:

"The principal or principal-designate may exercise his or her discretion regarding other occurrences and whether police contact is necessary. A school principal may contact the school liaison officer or the district youth coordinator on school-related matters. In the event a school liaison officer is not available, then a school principal may wish to consult with the appropriate school superintendent on whether a particular matter warrants police involvement or response." Again, it's left up to the discretion of the principal. We know that; Bill 157 doesn't change anything there either.

"Reporting of children suspected to be in need of protection:

"Duty to report"—and it's part of the Child and Family Services Act.

"Despite the provisions of any other act, any person, including a person who performs professional or official duties with respect to children, has reasonable grounds to suspect child protection concerns, the person shall forthwith report the suspicion and the information on which it is based to the York Region Children's Aid Society. Proof is not required in order to report a concern to the CAS and/or the police that a child might have been abused or neglected.

"If a person has made a referral to the CAS and has further protection concerns regarding the same child, they are obligated to make a referral to the CAS each time they have new information.

"It is the duty of the person who has the suspicions to make the referral to the CAS and not to have another person make the referral for them.

"A person who performs professional duties or official duties with respect to children includes the following: a health care professional, physician, nurses, dentist, pharmacist, psychologist, teacher, principal, social worker, family counsellor, priest, rabbi, member of the clergy, operator or employee of a day nursery, youth or recreation worker, peace officer, coroner, solicitor, service provider and employee of a service provider.

"Professionals, as defined above, could be subject to a fine if they do not report protection concerns." That's the end of the school report. Again, what does Bill 157 have to do with any of that?

Minister, you are not reinventing the wheel, but you have tuned the parents of these victims out. Again, in November, you said, "It is absolutely the intention, and has been the record of this government, to confront the difficult issues of school safety that confront our schools in the province.

"When we came into office, we began immediately to revise the legislation that had been put in place by the previous government that did not deal fairly with students across the system, that actually created the situations where kids were out of school on limited expulsions without any support programs. That has stopped.

"Currently, my parliamentary assistant, the member for Guelph, is leading the safe schools action team. They are looking at what kinds of reporting gaps exist among the different legislation, and we will be addressing those gaps."

Minister, the York board has these protocols in place and has had them for several years. Clearly, writing them down isn't enough.

1440

What Bill 157 needed to do, and has failed to do, is create consequences for those who fail to follow these legislative requirements. If the schools are using expulsion and suspension as disciplinary tactics for students, what are the consequences for school administration, for school boards and for ministry staff that fail these vulnerable students? Bill 157 is an insult to teachers who have already been using these protocols, and they are in

place. What they need is support from the province in terms of direct reporting mechanisms and follow-up counselling. Where is that, Minister?

In October, Minister, you said the safe schools report "will be delivered this fall.... My parliamentary assistant, the member for Guelph, has been working with the safe schools action team. Remember, this is a safe schools action team that delivered the recommendations on changing the safe schools legislation that was so flawed, which was put in place by the members opposite when they were in government.

"I look forward to the report, which is going to be looking at gender violence, sexual assault, homophobia—issues that have not been tackled by governments in this province for a very long time. On top of that report, we've been investing in resources for schools. So \$43 million more has flowed to schools this year—to priority high schools, to hire more psychologists and social workers, the actual people who will keep our schools safe, the kinds of resources that schools need."

Well, leave it to your government to continue to place the blame. The problem is, Minister, that while you are here today under the auspices of fixing our supposedly flawed legislation, you have actually fixed nothing. There are no consequences for failing to report. There are no counselling components for either the victims or the abusers in serious incidents of violence and abuse. There is no requirement to bring CAS into the conflict when the abuse is sexual in nature. There is no direction, time frame or uniformity on the implementation of a safety plan following a serious incident.

Minister, you have been in government for almost six years. These legislative flaws fall on your shoulders. In November, Minister, in answer to a question from my colleague from Whitby, you clearly state that "all students in our schools need to have support they require so that they can succeed. Whether that student is a victim of an incident or whether that student is a perpetrator, we have to keep all of those kids very close to us." In your meeting with the parents of these victims—who were not kept close; in fact, they could not be kept further from you—you did not take action to correct the school boards and your staff that followed some of these situations, and they continue to go unchecked. Here you stand, Minister, to tell these parents yet again that they will have to make do with more weak policies and no accountability.

In my briefing this morning on Bill 157, I was repeatedly referred to Bill 212 and that piece of legislation as a wonderful base from which Bill 157 simply "touches up."

"(1) A principal shall consider whether to suspend a pupil if he or she believes that the pupil has engaged in any of the following activities while at school, at a school-related activity or in other circumstances where engaging in the activity will have an impact on the school climate:

"1. Uttering a threat to inflict serious bodily harm on another person.

"2. Possessing alcohol or illegal drugs.

"3. Being under the influence of alcohol.

"4. Swearing at a teacher or at another person in a position of authority.

"5. Committing an act of vandalism that causes extensive damage to school property at the pupil's school or to property located on the premises of the pupil's school.

"6. Bullying.

"7. Any other activity that is an activity for which a principal may suspend a pupil under a policy of the board."

The notice of suspension for all of this: "A principal who suspends a pupil under section 306 shall,

"(a) inform the pupil's teacher of the suspension; and

"(b) make all reasonable efforts to inform the pupil's parent or guardian of the suspension within 24 hours of the suspension being imposed."

So once again may I point out to the minister that we have the framework in place for mandatory reporting. What we need are consequences for failure to report.

Before the PC government brought in mandatory reporting for suspected child abuse, far too many cases were unreported. When there are legal consequences for failure to report, human nature being what it is, people seem to follow through more consistently.

Again in November and in response to the member from Whitby, you said, "The most important thing we can do is to make sure that our schools have the resources that they need to prevent violent incidents from happening in the first place. The most important thing we can do, when an incident takes place, is to make sure that the young people involved get the supports they need to get them back on track, and that is what we have been doing on this side of the House. We have been putting resources into the system to ensure that every child, every student in our system, gets the supports that they need—not just some of the students...."

What you have been doing on that side of the House, Minister, is paying lip service to this issue and ignoring the reality that these students are experiencing every single day. Since I raised this issue in the Legislature, parents have contacted me to tell me their stories and to express their concerns for the direction of our education system. Not one of these families who are suffering the long-term psychological effects of student-on-student violence was offered the supports that you so proudly refer to in your answers. Not one of these families was offered the resources that you purport to have invested so much money in. Not one of these families felt like part of the solution. In fact, they were treated like pariahs in their children's schools for trying to secure some measure of safety for their children.

In September, Minister, you stated: "You know, one of the really distinct differences between that party's approach and this government's approach is that we actually talk to people who do the work in the system that we're trying to fix. What we are doing right now is having a very intelligent, in-depth conversation with the sector about how to keep our kids safe. What are the

reporting requirements? Where are the gaps? Where are the things that we need to do to keep our kids safe? We have put millions of dollars into more human resources, into cameras for schools. We have changed the legislation to make it more rational. We've been on this since we were elected. What we know is that we need to have that conversation about reporting—that is what my parliamentary assistant is doing—with the experts and with the people in the field who understand education."

So, here you are saying that you have met with people who understand the issue, and yet you still haven't gotten it right. How can that be?

If you want to be completely truthful, Minister, one of the families I have been working with was not allowed to speak with the safe schools committee and to participate in that process—a family that has undergone this kind of victimization and abuse and lack of protection. They were told that their case was "too severe to be considered." What is that about? I find it ironic that their case was too severe to be considered, and yet no consequences have been implemented for the school administrator who so woefully dropped the ball on this poor child and on his abuser. It reinforces my belief that you hear what you want to hear. Unfortunately, that is short-sighted, and it will not protect the students who are in the situations now.

The C.W. Jefferys incident took so long to see the light of day that the statute of limitations expired. Is that your plan, Minister? To run out the clock so that you and your ministry can avoid that kind of accountability?

In response to my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora regarding the C.W. Jefferys case, you said, Minister:

"Just to be clear, as I have been as this question has been asked over the last few days, our interest on this side of the House is to make sure that every child in the publicly funded education system receives the oversight and the service that they need. There are police/school board protocols in place that require reporting in particular incidents. We're looking at those protocols. We're also looking at the various pieces of legislation that have reporting mechanisms in them to make sure that we have the correct mechanisms in place.

"I'm sure that the member opposite is aware of a letter that has come from the Ontario Principals' Council that says, 'Be very cautious about changes that you make to reporting mechanisms because, as we know, principals in our schools need to have discretion in dealing with the children in the system.'"

1450

Minister, you managed to pass the buck to the police and school boards while warning us that the Ontario Principals' Council was not supportive of legislating their accountability on this issue. The truth is that the Ontario Principals' Council doesn't want to see a few bad apples ruin the bunch and is supportive of mandatory reporting for serious incidents of violence and abuse.

It's shockingly hard to find a clear-cut definition from the minister on bullying, but we persevered and unearthed one from the 2006 ministry guide on the subject of bullying that says:

"Is it bullying if force hasn't been used?"

"Bullying can take many forms. It can be:

"Physical—hitting, shoving, stealing, or damaging property;

"Verbal—name-calling, mocking, or making sexist, racist or homophobic comments;

"Social—excluding others from a group or spreading gossip or rumours about them;

"Electronic (commonly known as cyberbullying)—spreading rumours and hurtful comments through the use of e-mail, cellphones, and text messaging."

This wasn't easy to find, and it's clear, if you look at the rest of that document, that it's focused more on hurt feelings than actual criminal abuse.

If this document is an indication of how the government views incidents requiring mandatory reporting, then it's clear that you just don't get it. Is bullying an offence that carries with it a suspension or expulsion? If not, then it fails and it falls through the cracks of Bill 157. All the schoolyard bullies can breathe a collective sigh of relief as their punishment continues to be subjective.

Once again, in response to the C.W. Jefferys issue, the minister stated, "It is the responsibility of the Minister of Education to make policies that are reasonable and rational and that address the issues across the system. The fact is that the reason the safe schools action team is looking at the reporting mechanisms across the province in all pieces of legislation is so that I, as the minister, can make recommendations about changes to legislation if that's necessary so that those gaps can be closed.

"To the contrary of what the member opposite said, I have taken action in the most reasonable method possible."

While I am pleased to hear that the minister understands where the responsibility lies here, it is cold comfort when you compare that responsibility to the brevity of Bill 157. I take issue, Minister, with your impression that you have acted in the most reasonable method possible. That may be true if you're talking strictly in terms of your political career, but definitely not when you consider the breadth of your powers and the limited way in which you employed them to safeguard the students who were in your care.

In fact, when I asked this morning in the briefing about the consequences for failing to report, I was told that the Ontario College of Teachers was responsible for disciplining their own. So I researched their policies, and here they are:

"Discipline committee members hear and determine matters related to alleged professional misconduct or incompetence against members of the college. The parties to a hearing are the college and the member who is the subject of the complaint.

"It is the responsibility of the discipline committee to determine if the teacher is guilty of professional misconduct or incompetence and, if so, to determine and impose a penalty. These may include:

"—revoking a member's certificate;

"—suspending a certificate for up to 24 months;

"—imposing specific terms, limitations or conditions on a certificate;

"—reprimanding, admonishing or counselling the teacher;

"—fining the member up to \$5,000;

"—publishing the findings in a manner considered appropriate;

"—fixing costs to be paid by the member;

"—requiring the successful completion of a course of study; and/or

"—fixing a period during which the member is ineligible for reinstatement or variation of the committee's order.

"Discipline hearings are generally open to the public. The committee panel may direct that the public be excluded from a hearing under certain circumstances."

Under "Incompetence", it reads, "The discipline committee may, after a hearing, find a member to be incompetent if, in its opinion, the member has displayed in his or her professional responsibilities a lack of knowledge, skill or judgment or disregard for the welfare of a child of a nature or extent that demonstrates that the member is unfit to continue to carry out his or her professional responsibilities or that a certificate held by the member under this act should be made subject to terms, conditions or limitations.

"Powers of discipline committee

"(4) Where the discipline committee finds a member guilty of professional misconduct or to be incompetent, it may make an order doing one or more of the following:

"1. Directing the registrar to revoke any certificate held by the member under this act.

"2. Directing the registrar to suspend any certificate held by the member under this act for a stated period, not exceeding 24 months.

"3. Directing the registrar to impose specified terms, conditions or limitations on any certificate held by the member under this act.

"4. Directing that the imposition of a penalty be postponed for a specified period and not be imposed if specified terms are met within that period."

There are other parts to that, but you know what, Minister? It looks like the Ontario College of Teachers has covered all of its bases. Shall I tell you, Minister, how many school administrators have been held accountable on the double-digit files that I have been working on? The answer is zero—zero accountability, zero discipline—and that is what the parents were hoping was going to change with this much lauded Bill 157. They were hoping for some accountability. Somewhere down the line, and true to form, they received nothing. Mr. McGuinty is on record in this House as wanting to see changes made, and here we are debating a few commas and semicolons.

The Premier said, "If there's one thing that I think we are legitimately entitled to expect of our publicly funded school system, it's that our children will, at a minimum, be safe there. Notwithstanding quality-of-education issues and challenges associated with learning, at a mini-

mum, we expect that our children will be safe in the schoolyard and within the school building itself. That's a legitimate expectation. I fully endorse the sentiment expressed by my colleague. As I say, I will ask the minister to look into these facts and report." Well, I say to the Premier, she has reported and it isn't much to speak about. It certainly will not go far towards keeping our kids safe in schools.

Minister, again in 2007 you responded to the member from Newmarket-Aurora by saying, "I know that the Toronto board is looking at the circumstances in the school. The important thing is that if the allegations are true, and I have no way of knowing specifically whether they are or not, then there are school climate issues that need to be addressed and there obviously needs to be, in every school in our province, an opportunity for teachers to talk about issues so that they can solve problems at the local level." Minister, I want you to know, if the allegations are true—no, scratch that; I demand that you find out if the allegations are true. The allegations of violence or abuse are occurring on your watch and in your schools.

I do not accept that you can sit back and wash your hands of these scenarios. I am fully aware that you cannot stick your nose into every allegation, not into every schoolyard spat—that isn't what we're talking about here. However, when these issues are serious, I expect that you know about them. By your responses in the House, it is unfortunate that you have not been made aware of some of these issues.

The issue I raised in the Legislature was in the Toronto Sun, and I know that your big issues binder is chock full of every article, particularly from Toronto, that deals with education. These articles are accompanied by a ministry brief on the issue, detailing for you, quite clearly, the where, the when, the what and the why of the incident, and what your suggested response should be. For you to say that you were not aware of one of the most egregious cases of student-on-student sexual abuse that I have ever heard of is difficult to understand. In fact, this case is seared into my memory. I would find it hard to believe that any mother or grandmother could forget it, let alone someone charged with oversight in that particular ministry.

Minister, you responded to our call for action by saying, "We are responding to a complex problem with a complex response. The system is looking at what is going on in their schools. That is their responsibility, and we're providing the resources for them to do that." Anyone who reads Bill 157 would be hard pressed to call it complex, let alone responsible. Let me brief you on this complex bill.

1500

This bill would require teachers to report actions by students that could justify a suspension or expulsion to the principal as soon as is reasonably possible. However, if the teacher or the board employee knows that a report has already been made to the principal and has no reason to believe that reporting that incident to the principal

would provide useful additional information, then they are not required to report it at all.

Reporting by the principal to parents of the nature of the activity and the nature of the harm to the pupil will be made mandatory, with the exception of students over 18 years old, or those 16 to 17 years old who have withdrawn from parental control. Reporting is also not required if, in the opinion of the principal, doing so is not in the pupil's best interests, regardless of age.

The bill would require board employees to intervene according to the policies or guidelines to be established by the minister under subsection 301(5.4) of the Education Act if they observe a pupil behaving in a way that would have a negative impact on the school climate. The bill grants the minister the power to establish policies and guidelines with respect to delegation of powers by principals and vice-principals, as well as for board employees and non-board employees who witness a suspension- or expulsion-worthy activity, and which kinds of intervention are appropriate.

The bill will come into force—get this—one year from now. What happens to the kids in the meantime?

This pretty much sums up your complex Bill 157. So let's be clear: This bill was introduced to fill the holes uncovered by the safe schools action team report, not the issues identified by our caucus and the families of the victims over the last year. Those issues will still be out there long after Bill 157 passes.

We want to see abusive incidents that take place at school reported unequivocally to the parents of the victim and to the police. If an incident would warrant a call to the police off school property, why wouldn't it warrant a call to the police when it's on school property?

This bill does not change which supports are required to be offered to offenders and victims of some of these serious incidents. In fact, there's hardly any mention of supports at all in the bill, despite a year of telling us in the Legislature about all the supports that exist.

Over the past couple of years, we've seen serious incidents go unreported to police. Little or no professional support was offered to victims, and in some cases the victim has been transferred out of the school while the offender carried on at the school, in their classroom and unaffected. Without making board and ministry policy mandatory under legislation, this will continue to happen: The victims will continue to be victimized and the abusers will get off scot-free.

The bill could be amended to require principals—and in the absence of a principal, the vice principal—to report serious student-on-student offences to the police, and to include the reprimands for not doing so. The bill could be amended to specify what minimum supports have to be provided to students involved in serious incidents and that, if deemed necessary, the offending student should be the one transferred to a different school, along with what supports should be provided. Those are just a few of the possible amendments that the minister could make to put some teeth into this bill.

Our party raised the issue of mandatory reporting last summer with regard to a number of very serious incidents

taking place in public schools in which the principal was aware of the incidents but seemed to deliberately neglect to contact the police. This bill would bring in mandatory reporting of incidents by teachers to principals—already the procedure, by the way—but it does not require the principal to phone the police. The government is deliberately using the language “mandatory reporting” to mislead the press and the public into thinking that they have resolved the issues our party has raised.

Also, this bill would amend the Education Act to explicitly say that the principal is not required to even notify the parents of a victimized pupil if, in the opinion of the principal, doing so is not in the pupil’s best interest, regardless of age. What this means is that the case of the young Muslim pupil who was sexually assaulted by a gang of five boys at C.W. Jeffreys, that was uncovered as a result of the Falconer report, would not have been impacted by the passing of this bill. The principal and vice-principals would still have been able to claim to have acted in the pupil’s best interests by not reporting this incident.

I am certain that in the committee part of the process, the minister will have a tough time looking into the faces of these parents who have been struggling with this issue for years. No doubt, we will see the PA more than we will see the minister. However, I know that Lindsay Hyde and others will come forward to describe to you why this bill just does not meet the mark.

Jean said:

“What really bothers me is the lack of attention the school paid to her problem. As well, what was the bus driver on her school bus doing, obviously nothing?”

“How could so many students just sit back and watch this girl being assaulted? I can only guess the bullies run the school and most of the students as well.

“Here we are with another loophole—is the school bus considered school property for the sake of this legislation?”

“Does the province wash their hands of our students’ safety once they get on the bus?”

Dave S. said:

“The only reason this story is in the news is because Lindsay went public with it in the hopes of ending the torment.

“The media may have latched on to it for any number of reasons, but it initially came to light because she spoke out.

“Lindsay’s bravery made it possible for so many victims of bullying to reach out and tell their story.

“It is unfortunate that she had to go that route but it was out of sheer desperation, and Bill 157 would not have made one bit of difference to her experience.”

Kelly said:

“No respect for themselves, let alone others. No respect for authority. Spitting is one of the most disrespectful and disgusting things anyone can do to another person.

“The bully got caught and Lindsay called the police and charges were laid. Finally! The school continued to

ignore the pleas for help from a young woman just trying to get an education.

“The school is crying foul now because their name is being spread across the papers as an uncaring place to go for an education of any sort.

“The bully was suspended many times and is a ring-leader and an attention seeker.

“Bill 157 makes no provision for repeat offenders—the system has no recourse to deal with them.

“Persistent bullies need therapy, they need the resources of our schools and province to help them turn their life around now.

“As I said before, we can pay to support them and turn them around now or we can pay for them to be a part of the system in one form or another for the rest of their life.”

Finally, Andrew makes a very good point:

“No remorse, again no help for the victim, she will just be shuffled around till she (the ‘problem’ for the board of ed) is quiet.

“Thanks a lot to this reporter and this story, more kids will use violence to get in the news (makes great/fast street credibility).

“Time for government of Ontario to get off their rear ends and fix the problem, not toss it to area boards to try and fix!”

Well, Andrew, I doubt that this government is going to fix the problem, but I’m glad you posted this statement.

Too often, our comments on this side of the House are viewed as strictly partisan and can be easily ignored by the government members in that context. Andrew is a voter, Minister, a taxpayer and a concerned citizen who has seen through the charade played here by the government, and he understands where the buck stops. I wanted to get the voices of Ontarians on the record so that the minister cannot so easily dismiss the points I am making here as partisan nonsense.

On March 4, a six-year-old grade 1 student was assaulted in a washroom of a York region Catholic school by two 13-year-old students. Although the principal was made aware of the assault, she did not report it to the parents. The parents found out about it later from the boy’s sister, who attends the same school. The six-year-old had been beaten with a belt. When the parents confronted the principal and asked if she would contact the police, the principal said that she had no intention of reporting the matter. The parents called the police, who charged the two 13-year-old boys with assault and assault with a weapon.

On June 11, 2008, Newmarket–Aurora MPP Frank Klees brought the issue to the Premier’s attention in the Legislature after his attempts to have the issue dealt with to the satisfaction of the parents were rebuffed at the school board level. Mr. Klees was contacted by the parents when they realized that no one at the local level was taking up their cause and they were concerned that their son’s assault was not being taken seriously by the school board. The Child and Family Services Act of Ontario states that child abuse at the hands of a parent or

a person in authority must be reported to police or the CAS, but there is no legal requirement to report abuse or violence at the hands of another student. This is a serious flaw in the legislation.

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On December 11, 2008, the safe schools action team released a report on gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour in schools. The report recommends mandatory reporting for teachers and staff of serious incidents like assaults to school principals.

Recommendations of the team report: "The school staff must continue to respond to a child who is or may be in need of protection, as required by the Child and Family Services Act.

"Principals must report serious incidents that occur in school or at school-related activities to police as outlined in policy/program memorandum 120 and in the Provincial Model for a Local Police/School Board Protocol.... The details of reporting serious incidents involving children under 12 are found in policy/program memorandum 120.

"All school staff must report to the principal:

"—Any incident that should be considered for suspension; and

"Any incident that the principal is required to report to the police, including those for which expulsion must be considered."

Second lastly:

"Schools must inform the parents of victims as well as the parents of the aggressors/perpetrators about serious student-on-student incidents involving their child or children. This is particularly important for the parents of students with special education needs.

"Schools must provide parents of victims with information regarding discipline/management of the aggressors/perpetrators, when asked, and with information about the steps being taken to protect the victim from future victimization.

"If a school must separate students after an alleged incident, it is preferable that the alleged aggressor/perpetrator rather than the alleged victim be moved. Supports must be provided to the student who is required to change schools.

"The Ministry of Education should request that the Ontario College of Teachers amend the Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession to include fostering and maintaining a safe and caring school environment."

These are the recommendations of the team. These are parts of the report that have turned into a bill with no teeth and no meaningful way to address the issues. They got it; the bill doesn't. We need to clearly define for our school administrators what our expectations are and what the consequences are for failing to effectively deal with cases of student-on-student violence and abuse.

Let me list for the minister the details of your most flagrant oversights.

First, the former principal and two former vice-principals of C.W. Jefferys Collegiate were charged with

failing to report an alleged sexual assault of one of their students by six youths in a school washroom in the fall of 2006. Allegations had been made at the time that school administrators knew of the attack and had even transferred the girl to another school, but did not tell the police or children's aid. Six months later, in December 2007, police laid failure-to-report charges. The incident only came to light during an internal investigation into the school at the death of Jordan Manners on the school property last May. The former administrators were all placed on paid leave. The Child and Family Services Act only says evidence or suspicion of abuse must be reported "forthwith." Punishment for not doing so is \$1,000. The charges against the school administrators were dismissed because of the delay from the time of the alleged incident to having the charges sworn. What an insult. What a travesty.

The crown, however, appealed the case. Justice of the Peace Gabriel John said the charges against these people, Charis Newton-Thompson, the former principal at the Toronto school, and former vice-principals Stan Gordon and Silvio Tallevi, were sworn last December, well after the six-month time limit in the Provincial Offences Act. Attorney General Chris Bentley said at the time the crown believed the "charges were laid within the necessary time." Minister Bentley also said, "It is the crown's position the alleged offences are 'continuing offences'—meaning if found guilty, the trio could each face a \$1,000 fine for every day the ... assault went unreported."

So really there's no justice in this case, Minister, and while it shows that these flagrant abuses are not the only ones out there, Bill 157 will not prevent another case like this from occurring. That's what we were all looking for. That's what the families were hoping for. What will prevent these abuses is if the minister accepts the amendments that I will be making to Bill 157, to give it teeth that it needs to make a difference.

We will be asking for identified consequences for school administrators who fail to follow proper reporting procedures. We will be asking for counselling resources to be allocated immediately to both the victim and the abuser within an acceptable time limit. We will be asking for a mandated safety plan that is victim-focused, not perpetrator-focused, and that is enforced. We will be asking that in cases of student-on-student sexual abuse or violence the children's aid be notified immediately and an appropriate investigation commences. We will be asking that the minister define "bullying" for the purposes of this legislation. These are just some of the issues that need to be codified if Bill 157 is going to do anything truly to make a difference in the way student-on-student violence and abuse is handled all over the province of Ontario.

To the families who continue to push for stronger legislation, I can say that we are not finished yet. Don't be disappointed yet. The minister still has time to make real, substantive changes to this bill.

Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of those whose voices have been silenced. I will continue to speak

for these people in this House until we can offer meaningful policy that will offer justice for all of our children. Policy is just that: It's just policy unless it has a heart and it can be implemented in a way that can help people. So let's get away from symbolism that has no substance. Let's do something real here. Let's make a difference for the case of children who are being abused by other children within our schools.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to congratulate the member from Burlington for her thorough critique of Bill 157 and for having played a role in bringing about this particular bill. I was about to summarize the three points that I thought she and her party were getting at, and then she talked about recommendations she will make. There is probably a lot more than what I was about to say.

The three things that I saw the Conservative Party pushing are: There's not enough support for the victim; that all incidents should be reported, because some are not going to be; and, third, that there aren't enough strong consequences for the perpetrators. I'm summarizing it more or less briefly, and you can correct me if I missed something. The problem I have with your presentation of the issue, including the government's bill, is that it doesn't deal with the real issues that cause students to misbehave, that cause students to cause violence against other students. Neither your presentation nor the government speaks to how we prevent these things from happening in the first place. That's the problem. I don't think that if you have tougher consequences you are going to solve the issue of safety. I don't believe that for a moment.

I think the safe school report introduced by Mike Harris in early 1998 simply didn't work. My critique of the government is that they have nothing in this bill that speaks to what causes students to be either bullies or to perpetrate violence other than just simply mandatorily reporting an incident. This is where I think the failure of the Conservative Party's analysis is and the failure of this bill by the Liberals. I will speak to that in about eight minutes.

1520

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to respond to the opposition critic. I think we need to begin by looking at what is already in place. In fact, the member has extensively read into the record what is already in place. What is already in place is a school board police protocol, which is very explicit about when police should be called. It includes threats of bodily harm and incidents of assault, and it really doesn't matter whether those incidents arise from bullying or some other argument. If there's an assault, there's an assault, and you should call the police. That's quite clear already in both the policy that describes violent incidents and in the school board police protocol. All boards have local protocols

compliant with the provincial protocol. We checked every single one of them.

Secondly, the Child and Family Services Act is very clear about when principals or other school staff need to notify children's aid. It's in there. We don't need to rewrite the law. There's already a law that says when they should be called.

What we have done, as a government, is put bullying on the list of offences for which you must consider suspension or some other discipline. In fact, the Tories did not include it. They thought swearing at a teacher was good for an automatic suspension, but they didn't think bullying was worth worrying about. It's us who said you need to worry about bullying; you need to work on preventing it, and when it happens, you need to do something about it.

The places where the gaps are, are when teachers don't tell the principal what's going on, and that's in this legislation; when principals don't tell the parents of the victim what's going on, and that's in this legislation, and when you need to intervene—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: The first thing I want to say is that I don't think you can find a critic in any portfolio on this side of the House who is better prepared or better equipped to comment on legislation we're considering in this House, and I congratulate her on what she had to say. She's a great colleague, and I have to note that she is, at least in part, responsible for the fact that we are discussing this legislation today.

Now, the instinct on the other side may be to immediately knock her down. I hope not, because the fact is, what we on this side want to do, and what my colleague is trying to portray here, is a wish to support this legislation. But we want to support a bill that mandates reporting of violence or abuse—physical and/or mental—we want consequences and we want those enshrined in the bill. We want to see a duty of care, and we want reporting to be absolute and never optional. That's all we're saying.

I don't think we're that far apart. I think what we're talking about is toughening things up. We want our children to know, as do government members, that they can come forward without any fear of repercussion, and we want parents to know that they can send their children to school every day with a degree of confidence that they are going to come home feeling good about the day they have spent.

We also want there to be an action-reaction part of this bill, so that everything carries consequences. School personnel must be able to undertake certain protocols—in fact, they must undertake those protocols—if conditions present themselves. This is not some notional idea. This is what we want to see in the legislation, because it does confirm to all who have any care, or are charged with the care of, children that every action carries an equal and opposite reaction.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I just want to say that it is important that all of us have input on this issue. Listening to the member from Burlington and everyone, I think those are valuable insights. I may not agree with her insights, but at least she's contributing.

I would say the key thing here is that in dealing with such a difficult issue as school violence, it be done in a comprehensive way, and that's what the minister has done. I know that the member from Guelph—they have taken time to form the safe schools task force. They've gone across the province to get input from people. I know it's not a silver bullet approach or a magic bullet approach; it's one that takes a lot of grinding.

I know the member from Guelph especially has had countless meetings and listened to hundreds and hundreds of people, has talked to people face to face across this province, and she also has incredible expertise in this area. She has been on the front lines as a former trustee, chairman of trustees of Ontario. Our minister has also been on the front lines. They have both been volunteers in their local schools. They were supportive of their local neighbourhood schools. They were also involved in contributing to better schools through their work as trustees, and now we're fortunate enough to have them in this House to give us their expertise on how to deal with these daunting issues dealing with schools and violence in schools.

I think we should put that into perspective, and I think that's why Bill 157 is a very systematic approach to dealing with this issue that hasn't just popped up today. It has root causes that are not only in Ontario, but if you look across North America, if you look across the world, there is the same issue of violence in the schools, because violence in schools is a reflection of what's out there in society.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Burlington, you have two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I would like to thank the member from Trinity-Spadina, the member from Guelph, the member from Thornhill and the member from Eglinton-Lawrence.

The issue is very close to my heart. My daughter, when she was barely a teenager, went through some bullying. It was of a much more minor nature than what we hear about in the House today, and I know the helplessness that I felt as a parent when it fell on deaf ears at the school. I had to work with other parents to resolve the issue. How old is she? She's 35 now. That is a lot of years ago. What I'm upset about is that this continues. I was hoping to see in Bill 157 something that would begin to resolve this and give the authorities at the schools some confidence that they had some legislation to lean back on.

Money and resources are only a part of what is necessary here. What we need here is a real understanding that we can't take our eye off the ball. We're talking about kids, how they feel in the schools and how they're able to learn when they're there. We've had

graphic experiences described to us over the last year. These are real experiences, they're not hypothetical, and these are the experiences that should be heard by the team that's working on recommendations, by the folks at the ministry who are trying to put the legislation together. That's how we're going to make a difference, by hearing these real stories and understanding them.

This isn't a nuisance to us. This is what's happening out there on the ground. I don't want to deal with this at a 50,000-foot level by some policy-makers; I want to deal with it with the folks who are at ground zero dealing with the issue. And that's where we should be.

I am hoping that through the committee process and by listening to the folks who are brave enough to come to talk to us, we will be able to make meaningful changes to this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It is a pleasure once again to speak to this particular bill, Bill 157, because it's called An Act to amend the Education Act, a bill that claims to keep our children, the students of this province, safe in our schools. In my critique, I'm going to show, I hope, that it doesn't really do that very much and/or very well, in spite of the claim.

We will be supporting this bill because it's better than nothing. By way of what it attempts to do, it's hardly revolutionary. In a typical Liberal fashion, it corrects something that was in place but now codifies it. Contrary to what the member from Guelph says when she says, "We have reporting mechanisms in place right now"—if we did, obviously you wouldn't be introducing a bill. So clearly, something wasn't working, and that's why you introduced a bill, to correct some elements of whether or not something is reported or reported badly, because you felt the need to fix something. So something wasn't entirely working.

1530

But we're going to support it because it's a small little bill. I'm not sure how many of us should be speaking on this bill, but I know that the Conservatives obviously want to speak this out. God bless; that's fine. But I don't think there's much in this bill that merits much discussion.

What I want to talk about in the next little while is what is not in the bill. I hope to be constructive—critical, but constructive—of the minister, the bill and the government, as best I possibly can.

Of course we need to protect our students. They must be able to attend school without fear. The goal of our schools is to provide places of learning and growth; we all agree with that. Environments that nurture creativity and critical thinking, to teach skills and knowledge that equip these young people for future possibilities—that's a given; this is what we want. The question, of course, is how we do this.

The problem is that what the government does not do is look at what causes students to misbehave in the first place. I believe that mandatory reporting doesn't deal with the issues that I feel need to be addressed.

The member from Guelph says that there's a problem when teachers do not report. I don't know whether she actually believes that or not. The minister did say the other day that teachers, by and large—maybe I'm paraphrasing her words—do report. The problem is not with a teacher not reporting; it's probably with the principal, and there are many different reasons why that may not be happening.

One of the things that we haven't looked at is, why is it that principals may not be reporting some incidents? Well, no school wants to be known as the one with problems. Generally, that's why some principals may not want to report some incidents. No school wants to be pinned with the stigma of overwhelming discipline problems, for one reason or another. Principals are afraid to acknowledge these incidents, because if they do, they become the target for those parents who say, "Good God, why would we want to send our kids there?" There is one incentive as to why principals may not want to report these incidents.

Principals are also under considerable pressure to reduce the number of suspensions so that the government will be perceived as doing something about school violence. That's another reason why some principals under-report incidents: because it is in line with what the government wants the schools to do, and that is to say, "We're solving the issues of suspensions and"—what's the other term?

Mr. Mike Colle: Expulsions.

Mr. Rosario Marchese:—"suspensions and expulsions." That's what the government wants to do. So principals have a sense of what it is they should be doing to be in line with the current government, in the same way that teachers and principals were in line with the previous government, the Mike Harris regime.

Good God, Mike is coming back in some form or another. This should bring the fear of God into a whole lot of people, and it will. Some Tories who are here and are new, like the member from Thornhill, don't know—or maybe he does—that Mike Harris, the former Premier, brought in the Safe Schools Act. It was a zero-tolerance bill that said, "As soon as kids misbehave, we're just going to kick them out, suspend them and expel them as fast as we can." That, my friend, was consequences.

I understand the personal incident that the member from Burlington brought to this Legislature; I don't minimize that for one moment. But when she speaks about consequences for the perpetrators—Mike Harris was good. He was really good. And what he was bad at was, "How do we help students?" He was good at expelling them, so he was tough on the perpetrators. Those are the consequences that the member from Thornhill and the member from Burlington speak about. But never once, in the years that Mike was here, and all the other fellow Tory travellers, did they talk about, "Why is it that young people do that, and what is it that we, as educators, schools and governments could do to help these kids out?" Never a mention of that.

Many years after Mike Harris—God bless him that he's gone—the Tories still revive that old stuff, as if

they've learned nothing from that experience in terms of what it is that we could and should be doing. That's my critique of the Conservative presentation today. It was rather long and it was a fairly good critique; I just disagree with most of it.

Interjection: That's surprising.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Because the problem isn't consequences; the problem is, what should we do?

Of course, why should the Tories be surprised about my critique of you? But I enjoy doing it, and I had so much fun when Mike Harris was here. Good God, I miss him. I'm looking forward to the member from Niagara West-Glanbrook coming forward as the new leader because he's the spitting image of Mike Harris. It should be fun, God forbid, should he get into office.

But I have to tell you, it's the wrong approach. No student and no criminal says, "I'm going to get a \$5,000 fine for this. I'd better stop." It's not the way it works. No criminal says, "Good God, am I going to get three years or four years in jail if I do this?" We don't do that.

The Tories actually believe that if you attach a consequence of six months, a year, \$1,000, \$5,000 or \$10,000, all of a sudden citizens are going to say, "That's it, I'm cleaned up. I'm going to behave from now on and forever." It's so wrong. It's not only simplistic; it's ideologically wrong. It never worked, and it doesn't work. So I have a problem with the presentation made by the Tories.

But I also have a problem with the Liberal introduction of this bill, because it simply says that we're now going to have mandatory reporting by teachers and principals. Okay. So now they're going to do that, and what is it going to do? What is it going to do to deal with the multiple problems that kids face in the school system and in the home? The answer is zero, absolutely zero. There is no discussion in this bill about why it is that kids do what they do.

Some of you may know—and some Tories know if they were in committee—that fetal alcohol spectrum disorder is a serious problem. It affects about 200,000 to 300,000 adults and young people. What many of you don't know—that is, members of provincial Parliament and the general public—is that when these kids suffer from this disorder, i.e., parents drink a lot while they're pregnant, it's going to produce this problem called fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, which does the following: Those children have absolutely no clue why it is that they do what they do. So if a child has this disorder and misbehaves in school, the majority of people will say, "We should punish that student. That student should not be able to do what they did and not get punished." The problem is that that child doesn't have a clue why they're doing what they're doing.

The problem is that most teachers don't know about the disorder. They don't know how to perceive it, how to discern it, how to understand it, and they don't know the symptoms. As far as teachers are concerned, these kids are just not listening to the instructions. So this is the kind of young man or woman who can easily be expelled

or suspended, and that young man or woman will come back into the school doing the same thing over and over again because we haven't worked with that child. We haven't worked with the doctors, who sometimes themselves don't know about the disorder. So unless we get teachers, doctors, everyone in the community and parents to work together to understand what the problem is all about, these problems will continue forever. There's not one mention by the government about what they are going to do to deal with this problem.

1540

There is no talk about poverty and how poverty causes educational, social problems in the classroom. Oh, I understand that some members of the Liberal Party connect poverty to misbehaviour, but there's no talk about what to do and how you deal with it in the classroom when issues of poverty come into the school—and we're not dealing with it. Some boards put a lot of money into trying to provide breakfast programs for poor kids, and the government puts in about 15% of these dollars to support some nutrition programs in some of our school boards, but most of our kids come to school hungry, especially when they're poor. If they're poor, they're not learning. If they're not learning and if they're not eating, they're probably misbehaving. You can punish them all you want, but poverty will come back into that classroom. So you can have consequences, you can fine them, you can do what you want, but unless it deals with issues of poverty, the problem comes back.

Neither the Tories nor the government talk about mental illness—and I noticed that both the minister and the parliamentary assistant mentioned mental illness today, after I made my response to the ministerial statement the other day. They mention it in passing, but they don't talk about what it is, by way of supports, that we are providing in the school system to support our students, to support our teachers and to support the principal—no talk of it whatsoever. The problem is that a lot of young men and women who have a mental illness of sorts sometimes look as if they're just fine. Teachers don't know how to perceive a mental problem. Teachers don't know how to deal with a mental problem. There's no talk about what we can do to help that poor teacher deal with that issue—none.

That's the problem I have with the government's presentation of this bill: It doesn't speak to why students do what they do. They might understand it, and they might think that mandatory reporting will solve it, but it doesn't solve it.

What about issues of poverty and public housing? Does anybody reflect on what it means to be in public housing that hasn't been repaired for 30 or 40 years, when you live in substandard housing, and how that makes you feel? It doesn't make you feel good. When you've been in poor, substandard housing for 30 or 40 years, you're going to promote, you're going to engender, the kinds of negative feelings that a lot of young kids bring to the school system that are going to cause problems, yes, of bullying, and yes, of possible violence.

There's no mention of what the government is doing by way of how to prevent a problem or violence from happening in the first place.

I talked about fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, about poverty issues, mental illness, housing and how it is that poor kids in public housing bring social problems into the school, and I add to that sexual abuse. How many young men and women are sexually abused by someone close to them in their family? They come to the school system carrying this particular problem for a long time. It carries problems. These young men and women are likely to lash out at someone, either someone else or even themselves or someone close to them. But there's no talk at all about what we can do to help kids who are sexually abused.

There's also the problem of substance abuse: drug and alcohol abuse. When a young man or woman lives in an environment where mom or dad, or both, are drinking or are on drugs, or both, it's going to bring a great deal of social problems into the school system. What are we doing, as a school system, to deal with that? We're doing very little. How do consequences for these kids help that poor child? There is no systemic policy that deals with these problems.

The member from Eglinton–Lawrence talks about—I wrote it down—the need to bring in a systemic approach. This bill doesn't do that. There's nothing systemic about what this bill does, other than just simply reporting: having the mandate to report, obliged to report. That's all it does. There's nothing systemic about how you deal with the root causes of violence, nothing at all. The member from Eglinton–Lawrence mentioned that we need to deal with it in a comprehensive way, but the bill doesn't do that. It fails in every possible way in terms of what we could and should be doing to help our students. So the members talk about what they think the bill does, but it doesn't do anything of the sort.

There are the additional problems of the inadequacy of child care. How many parents are working and are putting their children in substandard care—not in subsidized care services, where you've got trained child care workers, but in some substandard place in some home where there is no training, where there may be problems in these homes where these young kids are being looked after? We don't speak about the inadequacy of child care. This government was supposed to spend \$300 million of their own money in child care, and has not spent one dime. They constantly attack any government that's there, whoever they are, saying, "They should be supporting us." But they said, "We're going to spend \$300 million of our own dollars on child care," and not one cent has been spent.

We have the problems of parents who are working at two or three jobs. If they're single, they're probably working at two jobs, sometimes three. Some people, moms and dads, are probably working two or three jobs and they don't get home on time. There's no talk about how we support those kids where the parents I'm describing need to be able to work, and work overtime, and they can't look after the kids; there's no talk of this.

There is no talk about the unemployed and those who are chronically unemployed and underemployed and are likely to be unemployed for a year, a year and a half. Some of these people don't want to go on welfare, and even if they do, it's inadequate to live on. There's not talk about what the social and psychological consequences are for these parents and what it does to that family and to those kids. This is what we should be talking about. Unless we deal with these issues, this bill is, quite frankly, useless.

I know it codifies what's already in practice, but please, a whole bill? I mean, there's even the possibility that the Tories may want to have, I don't know, weeks of hearings on this, but please: This is a bill where we should have the main, lead speakers speak to the issue, just be done with it and move it on, and then talk about how we help those poor kids who have social and psychological and mental problems, so as to prevent not just bullying, but violence in the school system. That's where I think we should be going and that's where I think this government is failing us. They make reference to something that I've said here and there, now and then, but other than that, there's very little.

I want to tell you—and this is also dear to my heart, because the Falconer report was presented a year and some months ago. I don't know if you noticed, but neither the minister nor the parliamentary assistant ever mentioned Falconer. Have you noticed?

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Me too. I've never heard a Liberal or the parliamentary assistant or the minister say, "The Falconer report: Hmm. Whatever happened to that?" And by the way, didn't we pay for that report?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: No, it's a board report.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: We didn't pay for that report. The board paid for it. The board that has deficits every year paid for it, not the government. We wouldn't want to confuse anybody. "It's the board that did it, not us"—meaning the Liberals—"therefore, if we don't mention Falconer, it's okay, because the board commissioned it." And where does the money come from to fund the boards? It comes straight from the province, because the boards don't have any power to raise money any longer. So if the boards are not given the money by the provincial government, they are in trouble. But not once have I heard one Liberal say, "Falconer report." It's as if it's a dirty word to mention. It's as if by mentioning it, somehow we're implicated negatively by it.

I want, for your pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to mention some of the recommendations that the Falconer report made, because I think they're instructive; specific recommendations from Falconer. Here are just a few specific ones which, in my view, if acted upon would have considerably more impact on the safety of our students than this bill, which has absolutely no impact on the safety of our kids—absolutely none.

1550

Numero uno recommendation: The board should establish school-based teams made up of social workers,

child/youth workers and teachers to help family caregivers navigate and access the mental health services their children and youth require, and these teams should make use of a variety of treatment techniques and work across disciplines. That's what I was talking about earlier on, in terms of what we should be doing. But Falconer was very specific—and I don't know whether I'm being helpful to the Liberals, but I've got a copy here in case some of you want it. I'm sure the parliamentary assistant can get a copy presto if she needs to, to help the rest out.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The Falconer report? Sorry if you missed that.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, I think you should pass it around to the other members because I think they want to know what he said, right?

Number two: The board should provide wraparound programming in schools where there is a significant population of students who are in jeopardy of falling outside of the education system. "Wraparound" means basically that you provide supports in the morning, when parents have to work, and in the afternoon, when parents are still working. That's what they mean by "wraparound services."

The panel finds that selected schools in marginalized communities should be designated as community hubs. Now, remember, even the minister speaks of community hubs, but only every now and then, and you really don't know whether she really feels it or not. Falconer says that some schools that are marginalized should be designated as community hubs. Community-hub schools will become the focus of the neighbourhoods that they serve; local community organizations and groups will be encouraged to become part of the school community in order to facilitate a closer connection between the school, students, parents and the community. This is a good recommendation. So I would have thought—understand, the boards are broke. They're in a deficit situation. In fact, Toronto board has a \$43-million deficit, and they were just laying off some educational assistants and other staff. By the way, the Toronto board is not unique in terms of facing deficits. Most other boards across the province have been facing deficits since Mike Harris, and under the Liberals as well.

Madame la ministre, I was saying that the panel finds that selected schools in marginalized communities should be designated as community hubs—and I know you like the idea. But why haven't you picked up that idea and said, "We're going to do that"? That's what puzzles me. You know that I like you, and I think you do a good job. That is not the point. But I really do believe that you, under normal circumstances, would be taking these recommendations and implementing them, and I'm puzzled as to why you are not doing it. That's why I raised them, because I want you—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Well, when you do, let me know because Falconer is waiting.

The board should restore the community outreach worker position. The minister would know that because she was a trustee at the time when they used to have these outreach workers. The panel recommends that the community outreach worker gather, coordinate and act as a clearing house concerning information about current programs and services provided by the existing community partners and schools. It's another good recommendation.

Another recommendation from Falconer: In order to facilitate in the building of community hubs, the board should review the level of caretaking staff at each school to determine if there is sufficient staff to maintain the school such that the school can serve as a welcoming and positive environment for the community. It's a good suggestion; they're all good suggestions.

The Ministry of Education—this is where they name you, Minister—should increase the benchmark costs for all components of the funding formula—the foundations grant, the special purpose grant and the pupil accommodation grant—so as to close the gap between funding provided and actual costs of operations.

This reminds me of what the Liberals wanted to do a long time ago, and that was to make sure that we set up a standing committee that would deal with the funding of our school system and give it the transparency that we all wanted, that we would have this on an annual basis so that we could all, both opposition parties and the government, see where the money is going. That was a promise made by the Liberals in 2003. I'm still waiting for that.

"The panel recommends that the Ministry of Education, in consultation with school boards and other members of the education community, should develop mechanisms for annually reviewing and updating benchmarks in the funding formula and for conducting a more comprehensive overall review of the funding formula every five years."

I got ahead of myself. So Falconer agrees with me, and I agree with him. I'm sure that when Kathleen, the minister, was on this side of the House, she would have been ranting and raving like some of us. I'm sure if Gerard Kennedy were back here in opposition, he would be ranting and raving, should the Tories be in that position right now. Alas, they're in power, so who knows? God bless.

"The Ministry of Education should increase the funding of the demographic component of the LOG"—that's the learning opportunities grant—to the level stipulated by the 1997 expert panel that studied the creation of the learning opportunities grant," which was \$400 million, adjusted to reflect inflation.

"The Ministry of Education should 'sweat' the demographic component of the learning opportunities grant so that the funds received by the board are used solely for providing programs to mitigate socio-economic factors affecting marginalized students. The new demographic component should include a built-in accountability process mandating that school boards report

annually on the programs and services funded by the grant and on their effectiveness."

I like that recommendation. If Kathleen Wynne, the minister, were here with me, we'd be saying the same thing, and if mon ami Gerard Kennedy was here in opposition, he'd be saying the same thing, and I would be agreeing with them. Now that they're in government, I just have to take on their role and push them to do that.

You understand that a lot of money goes to boards—this is true—and the government, both Tories and Liberals, say, "Well, they're getting a whole lot of money for this and this, this and that, and if they don't spend it, it's not my problem." The problem is that a lot of this money is not sweated, so that any monies that go to the system can be used for any purposes, and they are. The money is usually used to cover holes in the education system at the local level.

So you have money that is presumed to go for ESL that's not used for ESL. It means that in some schools in the north end of this city, 40% or 50% of the kids come from other countries where English and French may not be their first language and where they don't have a Roman alphabet, and they don't have any ESL at all—no ESL. Some 40% or 50% of these kids in some of these schools get no ESL support, but if you ask the minister, she'll say, "Oh, no, we've given the Toronto board loads of money for ESL," or she'll say, "In general, we've given \$200 million"—whatever figure you want to throw out of that. The point is, that money is just used for whatever purpose boards need to be able to cover and patch up holes.

The money is not sweated. You've got a lot of money that comes from the federal government and provincial government for French programs, but it's stolen from the French programs and given to other programs. Why do boards do that? Because the dollars are not sweated. Why? Because governments do not require them to. Why do governments not require boards to make sure they account for every dollar that's going for the stated purpose? Because governments can have the luxury of saying, "They get the money. What they do with it is not our problem. Go and attack the boards."

Speaker, you understand the kind of politics I'm talking about. I'm of the view, of late, that money should be sweated—that's the term they use—so that we know exactly where it's going. If we say that \$400 million is going somewhere, it's not going to be touched by anyone for any purpose other than that for which it was intended. That's the point.

Special ed is another problemo of this sort. Special education is a real problem for me. The Conservatives used to have a program called ISA, the intensive support amount. Based on that program, \$953 million was being spent. That program initially was fought by the system—in particular by teachers and even by some of the opposition members at the time. Eventually the Liberals under Mr. Kennedy said, "Oh my God, we're over-identifying; we're overspending. Some of these kids are being over-identified, for which boards are getting money they are not spending on those poor kids."

It was a beautiful excuse by the government to find a way to take that money out of special ed and provide it for anything else they wanted to promise, such as the promise of full-time JK or full-time SK that's about to come. So \$953 million was stolen from the intensive support amount—taken away from there—and given on a per pupil basis to every school board irrespective of need.

In my view—in my estimation—half of that money is going to special ed and the other half is going to provide for every promise the Liberals have been making and are going to make. They've stolen special education money from kids who desperately need it, and it's going who knows where? I know you will deny it, of course.

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Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: But there's more money in that.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You keep saying there's more money. You keep saying there's more money for everything, and yet there are more kids requiring special-education support than ever before, more kids who are waiting in line for an IPRC—the identification, placement and review committee—more kids waiting. We don't have a clue; nobody is tabulating that anymore. When he was in opposition, Kennedy wanted the government to make sure we kept track. Do you think the Liberals are keeping track of how many kids are waiting?

Do you know—do we know—how many kids are desperately seeking to be identified and are not? Do we know how many kids are never going to be identified, who are struggling from one year for the next because they are in the regular classroom without any support as we fire educational assistants here and there? We don't have a clue. All we hear from the government is that things are really rosy and getting better; they're spending so much more and everything is really cool. I say I don't think so. Besides, there are no facts to prove that at all.

So I'm worried about special education. I'm worried about the fact that special education is increasing as a concern in our school system. I also think it's chemicals that are altering our physiology and affecting more and more of our kids, and I blame those corporations you are so close to—100,000 of these chemicals, here and there, wherever they are. I think they're changing and altering our physiology in ways we cannot comprehend, and I believe they're causing more and more special-education problems than ever. We're not dealing with that. But that's a separate matter.

Falconer continues, "The Ministry of Education should reconstitute the local priorities amount as 5% of the basic amount of school boards' pupil foundation grant (updated as per above noted recommendation), and that boards apply the local priorities amount to locally established priorities, programs, and services aimed at the continuous improvement of student learning and achievement with particular focus paid to at-risk schools."

Another recommendation is that the board "should hire 20 new full-time social workers." If Kathleen was in opposition, or if she was a trustee of the Toronto board, she would be demanding this, of course, but she's the

minister. And if we hear the minister, she'll say, "Oh, no. We've hired more of these people than ever before, but they haven't acted on this report." And the reason the Toronto board can't act on this is because they have no money; they're broke. And the reason why the government is not acting on this? I don't know. I really don't.

"The 20 new full-time social workers should be dedicated to high-priority schools determined by the board based on criteria that includes drop-out rates, high absenteeism, suspension/expulsion data, LOI ranking"—that is the learning opportunity index—"and number of safety incident reports."

Another bullet: "The panel recommends that the 20 new full-time social workers dedicated to high-priority schools should not be assigned to more than two schools each."

The board "should hire 20 additional child and youth counsellors." If the minister were here in opposition and if she was a trustee, she would be demanding this, because she was there as a trustee when we actually had youth counsellors, and now they're gone.

"The 20 youth counsellors should be dedicated to high-priority schools determined by the board based on criteria that includes drop-out rates, high absenteeism, suspension/expulsion data, LOI ranking and number of safety incident reports."

"The panel recommends that the 20 additional youth counsellors dedicated to high-priority schools should not be assigned to more than two schools each."

The panel recommends that the board "should hire 24 additional attendance counsellors to meet the needs created by the mandatory learning to 18 provisions of Bill 52."

These are the things that Falconer recommended. None of these things have happened and none of these things are likely to ever happen. The minister and the parliamentary assistant have never talked about those recommendations and have never said once what they are going to do to help to implement those recommendations. It was a huge report. The hearings lasted for quite some time. It talked about the fear of reporting, the lack of reporting; it talked about sexual harassment, sexual abuse of young females in particular. And we've done absolutely very little. I don't get it.

The Falconer report talked about the idea of—another recommendation, which I'm desperately trying to find. Here it is. "The Toronto District School Board's community safety advisory panel recommended the creation of a provincial school safety and equity officer to be the central repository for the reporting of serious issues of school safety. We have not had the minister respond to that recommendation made by Julian Falconer and the advisory panel."

So, you see, there are many, many recommendations that have been made that would help to make our schools safer, that would help to protect our students, that would help to deal with prevention, along with all of the issues I identified that bring about problems in our school system, and we have done very little to deal with them. Unless

we do these things, mandatory reporting will not solve anything. It will make a few people feel good; it will make the minister feel good that we've done it—under pressure from the Tories, I understand. But other than that, what does it do? And even the Tories are saying it's not good enough, although I disagree with their approach to the issue. But this bill does absolutely nothing.

It now adds an obligation on the teachers, on the staff, to intervene where it's safe—I don't know how they determine that—on matters of racism or racist remarks in the classroom and/or any other incident that could be very unsafe for students and the teacher. The minister says it was done by the teachers, where they actually intervened, but now she's going to make it obligatory, mandatory. I say to myself, "If it's now required, there's going to be a legal obligation on these teachers to actually intervene." There is a requirement to intervene. It's no longer a teacher assessing the situation and saying, "What do we have here? How do we deal with it?" The teacher is now obligated to intervene where it's safe, assuming the teacher is going to learn and be provided the information to understand when it is safe to intervene and when it is not safe.

1610

I am telling you that the obligations we put on teachers grow year after year. Teachers are no longer required just to teach; they're required to do everything else, and with this report they're now obligated and required to intervene on a matter between students where it deals with issues of race, racism and/or any other kind of inappropriate behaviour exhibited by students. Look at the kind of load that we put on teachers. And we expect them to do it; in fact, we demand that they do it. What an unfair thing we do to teachers, where teaching is not enough; where we expect and demand that they be policemen and policewomen, psychologists or social workers, mothers and fathers, that they become mediators—in fact, even more than mediators: that they intervene in problems that can be very threatening, not just to students but to students and the teacher. Look at the obligation we put on teachers and the poor principal.

How are the poor principal and the teacher going to deal with the issue of what a reportable incident is? It's to be defined. I look forward to the parliamentary assistant and the minister defining this particular issue, but it's not going to be easy. For the most part, most of the incidents are easy to deal with. Yes, they're complex, but a whole lot of these issues fall between the cracks in terms of what an incident is: serious, grave, or not so serious. How do you define that? We'll see. It appears that the government has a sense of where they're going to go with this. I wait and see what the government's going to do.

There are a whole lot of issues that need to be dealt with, for which this bill is not suited to solve those questions that I have raised. The Falconer recommendations are good, but there are many other things that government could be dealing with.

The bill contains statements like this: "If the minister has established policies or guidelines," and, "The min-

ister may establish policies and guidelines." What is that about? What is the language, "If the minister has established policies and guidelines," and, "The minister may establish policies and guidelines"? What happened to the word "must": "The minister must establish policy and guidelines"? It hasn't done so since 1994. Clarifying the role of everyone involved in reporting and documenting—and what such reporting and documenting is to include: reports on the OSR, the Ontario student record, and the violent incident reports.

The legislation is based on the faulty assumption that the old directives and policies are fine, and clearly that's not the case. What is needed—and the member from Eglinton—Lawrence used this word—is a comprehensive review of all policies, procedures and guidelines regarding reporting. We need that, but it's not part of the bill. The bill says, "If the minister has established policies or guidelines," and, "The minister may establish policies or guidelines," but it's not there. Maybe it should be. What do you think about that, parliamentary assistant, minister? Maybe you should put the word "must," because these guidelines and policies have not been reviewed comprehensively since 1994. If the old policies and procedures were adequate, we wouldn't have the situation in our schools that we have now.

It is the view of many teachers that it is due to the failure to clearly define the roles, and failure to keep documentation which would allow the province-wide tracking of violent incidents, including those deemed to be less serious—that we should be dealing with. And so, this bill seems to have been advanced largely to address a few instances where principals failed to follow existing board policies on this issue.

Is this really needed at all, for a couple of incidents? I'm saying that if it makes you feel better and you want to bring in a bill to deal with that, let's do it. But we've been saying for years that we need to restore and increase the number of social workers, child and youth care workers and support workers in schools. We believed it then and we believe it today.

And we believe strongly that the recommendations made by Falconer should be implemented. They can only be implemented by the government that holds the purse strings, not the board of education, the Toronto board that is broke. They cannot do this on their own. If they do this, it means taking money from some other pot to implement these recommendations. That's why we don't see the board in a hurry to implement it. That's why they don't talk about it, and that's why this government doesn't talk about it. Because they are useful recommendations; they're good recommendations; it was done painstakingly, after much consultation with many teachers and parents and students and principals; and we have overlooked and we have denied him the right that he deserves for to us listen to him and for us to implement those recommendations. We have done him a disservice and we continue to do him a disservice by disregarding his recommendations in his report.

There was a time when the minister said, "We have done 80% of his recommendations," and that is clearly

not true. Those recommendations have never been implemented—none of them. Mr. Falconer has expressed his frustration and his displeasure on a number of occasions here and outside of this place, because he did that report with an idea and with a feeling that somehow what he did would come to fruition, and nothing has come to fruition. I feel bad for him, but more importantly, I feel bad for the students that we're failing. And I feel bad for the teachers who are not getting the support that they desperately need, for those poor teachers who are saying, "I'm not a social worker. I'm not a psychologist. I'm not a policeman or policewoman. I'm not a mediator, necessarily; I'm not hired to be a mediator. I'm taught to teach, and you are forcing me, obligating me to acquire multiple kinds of skills that in many cases I do not have." We do not train our teachers adequately to be able to be all those things. That's what the Falconer report tried to do: support the teachers.

So we're going to support this bill. There isn't really much more that one can say. There's really no more that I do want to say. Mandatory reporting? Okay, but it doesn't solve the underlying problems that we have in our society, the problems of safety. The safety that we seek is so intrinsically linked to broader social issues and access to services that Falconer links to and speaks about and that I have made reference to in my long hour of debate. All I can hope is that the government at some point will listen, that parents will put pressure on the government to implement the Falconer report, that the government will actually invest in our school system, invest in our children, support our schoolchildren and our teachers to do a much more effective job than we at present are capable of and are not supported in doing.

With that, Speaker, I thank you.

1620

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I've been here for over a year now, and I have to tell you that I thoroughly enjoy listening to the member from Trinity-Spadina. He has brought some very important points here today.

Firstly, I do want to say that I appreciate his acknowledgment that the Mike Harris government's zero tolerance didn't work.

He also recognized that this is a complicated issue with many factors to look at, and that's what we are doing.

He also talked a little bit about the reporting. I want to mention that the safe schools action team, in fact, did review policies and procedures around reporting, and that is why we're here today with this legislation in the House.

The member from Trinity-Spadina also spoke about poverty and how poverty relates to this legislation. I just want to remind him that it was this government that introduced the first-ever long-term poverty reduction strategy. In fact, it was on December 4, 2008, that Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy was introduced. The strategy will represent an

additional annual investment of over \$1.4 billion at full implementation.

If Bill 157 is passed, Ontario would be the first province in Canada with legislation of this kind. Like the minister said today, this is an ongoing journey, and it is a step closer to making our schools safer. The introduction of this bill is yet another example of our government's leadership in education.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the opportunity to join the debate today on mandatory reporting.

As you know, Bill 130, a bill I introduced last year, in November, will be up for debate on April 23. In that, it calls for a series of provisions to enhance child protection measures in this province. One of the recommendations stemmed from the work that my colleague Joyce Savoline, the MPP for Burlington, had done with respect to certain abuses on school grounds. I included mandatory reporting because of the hard work she had done.

This bill is a disservice to the work that Joyce Savoline has done. It doesn't go far enough. Our concern is that the Liberals, in their rush to quiet us down on this side, don't do the work and the research and the proper drafting to move forward.

Several times in this chamber, Mrs. Savoline has brought forward the concerns of parents in this province. On many of those occasions, Mrs. Savoline actually had parents here, some of whom were also teachers, talking about their concerns for their children on school grounds. While drafting the Children's Safety and Protection Rights Act, 2008—Bill 130, as it's known—I found that she was so compelling that I included it as one of the nine measures in my bill. I'm hoping that bill will receive support from all three parties and that the Liberals won't be whipped to vote it down because it's not their own. I am pleased, however, that on a few occasions they have seemed to move on some of the initiatives.

Let's get back to the issue at hand, and that is mandatory reporting. Mrs. Savoline has encouraged the minister to move forward and to move faster. Unfortunately, that isn't the case, but I still applaud Mrs. Savoline's efforts for bringing this to our attention.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Pat Hoy: I am pleased to make a few comments following the remarks by the member from Trinity-Spadina. I was heartened to hear that his party is in general support of the legislation. We look forward to more conversation about the bill itself and how, perhaps, it could be enhanced.

It is indeed a complicated issue. Our society has evolved greatly from the time when many of us were either in elementary school or high school.

I can recall back in our community when there was a horrendous case of physical abuse. It was absolutely horrendous, and a teacher at that time reported it to the authorities of the day. From that time onward, teachers were compelled to report cases where they suspected

physical abuse. The penalty for that particular case was very severe in the end to the perpetrator. So that was physical abuse.

Now we're talking about some other issues, such as bullying, which could include physical abuse, but there are other forms—violence, vandalism, sexual assault, drug trafficking. So now we are enshrining another set of rules, shall we say—situations where reporting by all school staff to principals of those incidents which I mentioned for which a suspension or an expulsion must be considered.

Many of these things seem to have come through what we call the new society. It's my understanding in talking to teachers that many of these bullying cases are carried out not only in person, but also on the Internet. I know of persons who have changed schools, and the bullies have changed schools to follow them along. So I certainly welcome this legislation to protect our children in our schools.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to respond to the remarks of the member from Trinity–Spadina. I'm really very, very pleased that he has recognized that this is a complex situation and you can't simply have a knee-jerk reaction that says "thou shalt" and that's the end of it.

One of the issues that has been brought up is with respect to principals being required to intervene, or at least to notify the parents of a victim. We know that's what normally happens, but while that is what happens in the vast majority of the cases, that the principal gives the parents of the victim a call, we know that there have been some very serious cases where the principal didn't let the parent of the victim know what was happening—with very serious consequences—and that's why it's in the legislation that we need to correct that.

But we do also recognize that this is complicated and that we need to make sure that the principal has some legitimate discretion. Let me give you an example. I spoke earlier in my remarks about the case of students who were suffering from homophobia in the school. Well, I think you can imagine the case where a student is the subject of homophobic bullying and does share this with a trusted teacher, who shares it with the principal—as they should—and the teacher and the principal are working to get supports in place, working under this new legislation to intervene. But should they call the parent if the student were to say, "Please don't tell my parents, because if they think that I'm a gay or lesbian student, they may kick me out of my own home"? We've heard from students that that happened—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Trinity–Spadina, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: What I want to say to the members from Guelph and Chatham–Kent–Essex is that they both say that this is a complicated issue, and they're happy that I recognize it, as if somehow I didn't recognize it, as if somehow they recognized it and I didn't and they're glad that I did, so that we all recognize—

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: All right. But what I want from them is a response that says, "Marchese, you're right. Poverty is an issue." As the member from Hamilton Mountain said, we're dealing with that, but it's only a little part.

Giving a few more dollars for children is good, but then there's the issue of mental illness and housing, sexual abuse, substance abuse and the fact that parents are working at two or three jobs, and we're not helping those poor kids who may be the victims of that particular circumstance. The people are losing their jobs, and if they lose their jobs they get into mental illness and they want to hurt themselves, and their kids are in trouble. That's what I wanted them to respond to.

Of course I recognize it's a very difficult problem. But it's not so complicated. What's complicated is actually doing; it's actually acting. That's why I was critical of the government. I wanted the members criticizing me to say, "You're right. That's what we should be doing more of." We all recognize it's complicated. Okay. I made a whole list of things that I said you should be dealing with, and none of you commented about those matters that we've got to deal with in order to prevent abuse in our school system.

1630

To the member from Hamilton Mountain, you mentioned the safe schools action team, but I've got to tell you, there are 78 recommendations there, and I think this is the only recommendation that you implemented from that report. Where are the others? Why aren't we implementing the others? This is the only one—mandatory reporting—it seems. What happened to the other 77 recommendations? So it's that and it's the other issues that we've got to deal with, because mandatory reporting doesn't solve the other issues that I spoke about. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: Just to finish off from the member for Trinity–Spadina, Mr. Marchese, you are right: Poverty is obviously part of all of these issues, especially when you're talking about behaviour that is violent or abusive in nature. The schools are usually where it's manifested, but you can certainly find there are deep-rooted, tragic causes that manifest that violence in our schools.

Having been in a classroom for 18 years myself, I have a little bit of a sense of what goes on. I was fortunate enough to actually teach in some excellent schools in Etobicoke and Toronto—Michael Power high school and St. Michael's College School—where I was fortunate that the children came from very strong family backgrounds. The parents were very, very motivated and the students were very motivated. But it wasn't too difficult, just talking to my fellow teachers or in visiting fellow schools, to see the reality of violence and abuse and the need to deal with it.

I have a brother who teaches at Archbishop Romero high school at Rogers Road and Weston Road, and he

was telling me the other day that 10 of his former students had been shot dead. That's the reality of violence. I know some people talked about bullying etc., but you can just imagine, if you are a teacher and 10 of your students that you saw come in at grade 9, bright-eyed, very interested young students—and I notice the pages here. You can imagine: 10 of his students shot dead. That's the almost overwhelming reality of what we face in our schools.

What usually happens is that the reports—Julian Falconer's report went to the school to find out what was happening at the school. But I would say that what happens at the schools is a manifestation of what's happening in our communities, in our homes, in our neighbourhoods. The schools are always called upon for solutions, and the solutions are sometimes not to be found in the schools. The root causes are to be found sometimes in the challenges that students face. Some of them have ADD. Some of them, as the member from Trinity-Spadina said, have all kinds of learning disabilities, and that learning disability manifests itself in very aggressive behaviour trying to cope with a school setting. But every time, we ask our schools, our teachers, our supervisors and our principals to solve the problem of violence and how it manifests itself in our schools.

So this bill before us is an attempt to deal with the reporting of this aggressive behaviour, this bullying that happens in our schools. We're dealing with one small aspect of it. Even the small aspect of bullying and the reporting of it requires legislation. You can imagine how many pieces of legislation we would require to deal with this incredible challenge of violence in our schools and in society in general.

I would say that there are a number of interesting scenarios that have developed over the years. I can remember visiting one high school where the teachers were talking about the kids outside the schoolyard. You saw them—there were about 10 or 20 or 30 teenagers all outside the schoolyard. They were saying, "Well, those are the students who were expelled, so they've now formed a gang outside the school."

Under the Safe Schools Act, passed back in the 1990s, they expelled everybody. That was an attempt to try to solve the problem of violent behaviour. The students were easily expelled and suspended. It did not solve the problem, because those young people who were expelled and suspended, who were outside in the schoolyard, were basically being recruited by gang members to involve themselves in more violent behaviour. So the total expulsion program that was instituted back in the 1990s did not solve the problem of violence, because leaving those students out in the schoolyard—easy pickings for the gang leaders—meant those students would probably never come back to the classroom, because there were no programs, no supports. There was no connection between the school expulsion and the parents at home. In many cases, the parents never even knew that the children were expelled. All of a sudden, you had more gang members as a result of expelling those children.

That's why I really commend the member from Guelph, who has spent many months travelling the province talking, listening—doing a lot of listening—to parents, to students, to educators, to principals, about what we can do to ensure that when students are expelled—what to do about reporting violent behaviour, and asking for their input. She has been involved in a comprehensive, long-term investigation of the response to this issue. Her input has given the minister the impetus to put together Bill 157. This bill didn't come out of the minister's boardroom. It came out of the excellent work the member from Guelph has been doing for months. It's an attempt to try to deal with this problem of reporting and whether it should be compulsory or not. The recommendations here are sensible ones. They're based on professional input, they're based on parent input, and I think it is a reasonable approach to this issue.

We know for sure that there is no bill that's going to forever solve and cure the issue of bullying or reporting of violence. It's not going to happen in our lifetime. And it's not something that's unique to Ontario or Toronto or unique to Canada. This issue of bullying and school violence, it's sad to say, permeates classrooms all over the world. But at least we're attempting to try to deal with these issues in a sensible, reasonable and civil way, and Bill 157 does do that. I know there will be the critics who say that it doesn't go far enough, that it goes too far etc., and they have the right to have that kind of commentary. But I think we should make note of the fact that this is a very valid attempt to deal with the thorny issue of reporting cases of bullying and violence.

The member from Trinity-Spadina was talking about root causes etc. I know one program that works very well, that started out of Regent Park, is the Pathways program. The Pathways program deals with youth at risk. These are young boys and girls in their teenage years who are having trouble coping at school. They're having trouble with violence in school. They're having, sometimes, trouble with a home life which is not an ideal home life. There's a group of wonderful people from across Canada and across Ontario who have formed this Pathways program. It deals, in a one-on-one situation, with these youth at risk, trying to ensure that these youth at risk get the mentoring, the support, the after-school homework help to keep them in school, because in the old system of Mike Harris, the students would be instantly expelled, again, forcing them out on the street, and they would end up who knows where.

With programs like Pathways—and there are many other programs like this—what it does is get the student in touch with mentors of their own background, local community leaders, professionals, with guidance counsellors, so that student is allowed to reintegrate into school.

1640

We're talking about some of the root causes of this violent behaviour. I have a couple of programs like Pathways in my riding, one in Sir Sanford Fleming—it's an excellent school—where students, as a result of that

intervention, are now doing better in school, their marks are improving, and they are integrated fully into the school system. But it came with a lot of hard work by dedicated volunteers, mentors. It's a very comprehensive program.

You can imagine the cost of these programs right across the province. These interventions are critically important. It's certainly a lot better than losing young people by their dropping out of school and getting into a lifestyle that would not be conducive to being good citizens. There are strategies in place to help students avoid that kind of deviant pathway where they get into gangs etc. You have to have those preventive investments, along with dealing with the reporting of violence at the same time.

Also, if you take a look at the schools that we have all across Ontario—and again, as I say, if I look at the guidance teachers, if I look at the parent volunteers, the parents who coach, the parents who are involved with drama, the parents who are involved with sports, this is all part of reinforcing the school as a community and linking the school with the community, because, as I said at the beginning, too much of the emphasis we have is always on saying, “Where did the school fail?” I’ve said before, “Well, where were the parents? Where was the community? Where were the brother and sister? Where were the supporting members of the community before the incident happened in our school?” Invariably, it’s easy to blame a school and label a school and say, “Well, that principal, those teachers, that’s where the problem is.” The problem didn’t start at the school and it won’t end at the school, but we’ve come to demand that our schools solve all of society’s problems. We rarely look at what we can do as legislators, what we can do as business people, what we can do as community leaders to ensure that it’s not only the school that’s on the hook for solving these problems. All of us have to work in a meaningful way to help deal with these issues of violence, the issues of bullying and the issues of discrimination and behaviour that’s very out of keeping with what Canada is all about.

This takes incredible resources, it takes incredible expertise and it takes incredible commitment by everybody. But I know one thing for sure is that, generally speaking, when something happens at a school or a student at a school does something that’s, let’s say, bad in nature—a violent act or something—right away there is all kinds of notoriety given to the school, given to the students, given to that neighbourhood in saying, “Well, look what happened at that school.”

I can remember one time a number of years ago—two years ago, I think it was—we had a Canadian championship basketball team that came from my riding. Four of those boys who were on this national championship team were from an area in my riding called Lawrence Heights, which is one of the designated areas. They won the national championship for basketball, representing Ontario, and one of the parents, Mrs. Davis, phoned me and she said, “These four boys just won the national cham-

pionship. No one has given them any recognition. For sure, if these four boys or if my boy did something wrong, it would be all over the radio and the newspaper. But here, they won the national championship—don’t you care? Why does the press not care about these four boys who won the national championship?”

I remember that what I did was I brought the four boys down here. We had a reception down the hall here and invited the media to see these incredible young men who had achieved this great success. In fact, one of the young men is now at the University of California at Davis on a scholarship—in his third year now, I think. We asked the media to come and meet these boys and acknowledge them. No media showed up; zero showed up. Yet if one of those lads had done something untoward, they would have been there in a heartbeat. But these four young men who won the national championship in basketball for Ontario were not of interest to the media. Then they wonder why some of these young men who do good things sometimes wonder, “Jeez, where are the priorities around us? What do adults really have as priorities?”

Part of what we also have to do, along with reporting violence and bullying and so forth, is deal with the issues of learning disabilities. If you look at our correctional institutions, you’ll see that more than half of the inmates have learning disabilities—dyslexia etc. They come from broken homes. They come from very violent backgrounds. They come with medical situations. We have to deal with the medical root causes at times. We have to deal with and support the home situation.

We also have to encourage young men and women when they do things that are positive. We have to encourage schools and teachers and volunteers at schools and in communities—who do good things—to acknowledge accomplishment, to reinforce the fact that good things are to be rewarded and are to be part of what’s important in our lives as legislators or as different parts of society.

It’s very good to talk about disciplining. I certainly believe in discipline; I certainly believe in supporting the vice-principals. They do an incredible job, our vice-principals do, in school. If you’re ever in a vice-principal’s office, you can see, all day, the incredible work the vice-principals have to do, dealing with the youth who have challenges. They do this day in, day out.

We have to support those vice-principals; we have to support our principals, and the mothers and the fathers who are trying to deal with young people who sometimes challenge authority. And it just doesn’t come from one type of neighbourhood; it comes from all different types of neighbourhoods where young people tend, or at times will tend, to be rebellious.

This is a full-time undertaking by the Ministry of Education, through our school boards, through our teachers’ associations and through our community organizations, which are all trying to do the best they can.

This legislation is an attempt to shore up one small piece of this whole puzzle of how to make our schools work better, how to ensure that young people achieve

success, and how young people get to feel good about themselves and get acknowledged for when they do good and not just admonished when they make mistakes.

Young people, like all of us, make mistakes. But that's when the guidance counsellor has to be there; that's when the phone call has to be made to the mother or the father or the guardian, the grandparent. That's what makes this all work.

This piece of legislation is no final solution; it is basically part of the solution. In trying to ensure that there's a complete, comprehensive solution, it's going to take ongoing co-operation between all of us working together to look at the full picture of education. And it doesn't stop inside the schoolyard; it doesn't stop when school is out. It's on the weekends; it's 24/7.

It's something that the police also have an incredible role in—and I'm so glad; the feedback I receive from parents about the police resource officers in our schools is exceptional. These young police officers volunteer to take the job in these schools. They work with the teachers and students. They've been doing an outstanding job of trying to show young people that the police officer is not only there when something goes wrong, but a police officer can be a great friend and another support mechanism in a school. I know it's working very well in London, and the police resource officers are really well received in the city of Toronto. This is part of the whole package of supporting our young people. It's not just done by our teachers; it can't just be done by the parents. All of us have to be engaged in ensuring success for young people, because the consequences of not investing in young people are dire, to say the least.

Thank you again, and I appreciate everybody's input in this debate. I think it's an important one, because it deals with an issue that is certainly very challenging.

1650

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I recall standing here a couple of weeks ago in debate on the Green Energy Act and saying that debating a bill called the Green Energy Act wasn't necessarily going to make the Green Energy Act green. Just because you call something by a name doesn't make it so. When you talk about mandatory reporting, for example, there is no mandatory reporting unless it is, in fact, mandatory. The other thing I noticed in the presentation by my colleague from Eglinton–Lawrence as well as that of the member from Trinity–Spadina is that we're bringing into this debate elements of cause and effect. This bill is not about cause and effect; it's about effect only.

So I have to say the legislation is not what our party had in mind. It won't help to protect Ontario's students any more than what we've had to date. We want to see any abusive incidents that take place at school reported unequivocally to the parent of the victim and to the police; it can't stop at some median point. This bill just simply doesn't do that. As I've already said, just because the McGuinty Liberals are calling this a bill that pertains

to mandatory reporting does not solve the problem. Protocol is not the same, in any event, as law. It simply requires teachers to report violence to a principal, and then the principal reports it to the parents but not necessarily to the police.

Now, we've heard a number of incidents brought to the floor of this Legislature; for example, by my colleague from Burlington. Another example from my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora got a fair amount of public notice because this is something that, while not endemic to society, is occurring far too often. Ontario students and their parents deserve much, much better than this.

So I say again that calling something safe does not necessarily make it so, and saying that something is mandatory is not so unless it is, in fact, mandatory. Let's put some teeth in the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate today, because I think it's a very important issue that affects each and every member of this House in their own communities. There are a lot of issues we talk about in this House that pertain to individual communities, but very few times do we hit upon an issue that would impact each of our own communities. Certainly, when you look at the school system throughout Ontario, each and every one of us has schools and young people in our communities.

When you talk about the impact of bullying and the impact of some of the things that are happening in the schools—in the past, they either weren't happening or perhaps we just weren't talking about it. Perhaps we were glossing over the subject a little bit.

What's happened here, I think, as a result of that, is that a bill is being brought forward that I think is worthy of debate, which finally begins to address the issue of what parents and educators, and indeed the students themselves, have been talking about for some time; that is, the impact of violence in our schools, bullying in our schools, and the feeling that schools should be a safe place to be. I think it's something that educators, parents and, as I said, students themselves have agreement we need to do some more work on.

Now, obviously some members of the opposition will bring forward some suggestions that may be constructive, maybe some amendments they believe should be made that would strengthen the bill. Some of the opposition is simply opposition for opposition's sake. But any time you look at a piece of legislation, you have to look at if this bill was proposed, would our communities be a better place as a result of it?

I think, from what I've heard from this bill that I think is deemed worthy of support of all members of this House, that were this bill to pass, our schools would become much safer places, our communities would become much better places, and our students would have a much safer learning environment in which to move towards their future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to be able to again address this mandatory reporting bill. As I mentioned previously, I have a bill, Bill 130, before the Legislature. It is called the Children's Safety and Protection Rights Act, 2008. Among other things, it calls for mandatory reporting and amending the Education Act. Of course, that initiative came forward through my good colleague the MPP from Burlington, Ms. Joyce Savoline, who forcefully fought in this Legislature for us to take such actions.

Among the other initiatives—there are nine initiatives—some will amend the consumer services act, others the Education Act and two other initiatives. One is expanding the mandate of the independent child advocate; the other is expanding the mandate of the Ombudsman Act so that they may have more direct involvement in advocating and reporting to the ministers on how children are treated in our hospitals, our education system and through the children's aid societies in Ontario.

It also calls for something that child advocates have been calling for for some time now, which is dedicating November 20 as the provincial day of the child. Mr. Speaker, you know that November 20, worldwide and here in Canada, is known as the International Day of the Child. I think we ought to recognize that here in Ontario's Legislature. I think we also ought to recognize that in Ontario schools.

So, on April 23, I'll be looking for support from all of my colleagues in this chamber supporting me and our quest in the opposition in better protecting Ontario's children. But then, of course, I'd like to again thank my colleague from Burlington for the tremendous work she's doing on behalf of Ontario's children.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I am pleased to comment on the remarks by the member from Eglinton–Lawrence. He spoke about all the great things that kids do that they don't necessarily get acknowledgment for. In the work that the safe schools action team has done, we've found some really positive programs that students have been involved in, particularly at the secondary level.

One that can be used by any students for any sort of issue is where the students actually work with staff to identify issues in the school and then work on those issues with their colleague students. It might be bullying, it might be racism, it might be homophobia, or it might be bad stuff going on out in the parking lot. But the students identify the issues that they feel are making the school unsafe or an unpleasant school climate and then work together as a student body to address those.

Another one of the programs we ran into when we were doing research was more specifically working on issues of homophobia and sexual harassment. Again, what was important was that the students were initiating the workshops themselves and bringing other students to

come forward and talk about the issues, albeit under the supervision of a person from an outside agency who had some expertise in working with students. But the important thing, again, was the kids were identifying the issue and the kids were working on the issue together, and that made a big difference in the school climate.

There are great things we can do that don't go in legislation but that help kids.

1700

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Just one second. I'm going to mention this as long as it continues to be disregarded by members: Questions and comments are intended for you to ask questions and make comments on the person who debated before. Notwithstanding that, Mr. Colle, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Mike Colle: That's disappointing, really, because I challenged them. I asked why they don't think of doing more things to recognize the good things young people do. I also asked the opposition, what do you tell the teacher who had 10 of his students shot and killed? What do you say to that family who are afraid to come out of their home at night, never mind go to the library, because there are gunshots fired continually in that neighbourhood? What do you tell that student who is afraid to go to the library because he or she might be shot? Then you wonder the next day why the student has not done their homework or their research—because they are afraid to go to the local library. How does that impact what happens in our schools? And why is it—I challenge the opposition again—that it's always the schools that have to solve all these problems? Why is it always the teachers? Why is it always the principals? Why is it always the vice-principals? What about the rest of us who are part of the greater community? Don't we have a role to ensure that our streets are safe, our schools are safe, our homes are safe?

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Colle: I know the Conservatives don't want to hear about that. They just want to talk about punishing people. But we also have to talk about how we ensure that people are safe, through good homes, good food, good jobs for their mothers and fathers and good part-time jobs for the older students.

So it's a bigger program, much bigger than the Conservatives could ever envisage.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I rise today to participate in the debate of Bill 157, the Education Amendment Act (Keeping Our Kids Safe at School). Unfortunately, I do not believe the title will live up to its name. This bill has almost eerie comparisons to the Green Energy Act, which sounds good from the title. However, we see again that the devil is in the details, or, in the case of Bill 157, the lack of detail.

As parents, we send our children off to school every morning with the expectation that they will return home with knowledge and friendships, not hurt feelings and

bruises. Schools are supposed to be a safe haven for our children, a place for them to grow and learn not only about school subjects, but about themselves and how to form friendships.

Some students live in fear of going to school, the supposed safe haven. To some, it is not safe. It is the place where they feel terrorized, alone, unwanted and scared. It has to be heartbreaking for parents to send their children off to a place where they feel this way, but it happens, and it is our job as legislators to prevent it as much as possible.

The press brings to light children who are stepping out of the shadows of bullying to come forward and bravely tell their story.

Today I read the story of a Georgetown teen who was tormented by the same bully day in and day out for seven years. His life and the lives of his family were threatened. Seven years—that's half of his education. His girlfriend was sexually harassed. He went to school every day with the fear that he would never return home. Some days he contemplated suicide. Is this how our children should feel when they leave for school every day? Should they get on the bus in fear that they will never make it home? Should they feel that their life is so threatened by someone else that they would rather take their own life? Eventually, this teen graduated from high school—miraculously, I would say—and went on to college, where he was still harassed by the same bully. He received threatening phone calls, had his property vandalized, and his mother received a phone call threatening death. All of this, and no one could protect him. So he wanted to protect himself and his family. He took a fake gun to the home of the bully and threatened him. The bully backed down, but the teen was found guilty of attempted robbery. His bully went free.

In early February, a 12-year-old boy brought a gun to Runnymede Junior and Senior Public School, here in Toronto, to scare away his bullies. The boy was arrested and later granted bail. In court, he told officials that he had been verbally and physically abused for years and battled anxiety and depression because of it. Of course, it's not okay for any student to bring a gun to school and threaten innocent lives, but as importantly, this young boy thought that there was no one there to protect him, so he had to protect himself.

We have all heard the story of the Mississauga teen who had been tortured inside and outside of school by bullies. She is bravely speaking out to make others aware of her daily torment and raise awareness that bullying happens every day in school. And it's not just one particular person it happens to; it can happen to anyone.

I applaud the bullies who are taking a stand and revealing their pain publicly, in hopes that someone would stand up and help them as much as we need to help the victims.

On numerous occasions, my colleague the MPP from Burlington has risen during question period to call for mandatory reporting of bullying in schools. This is a member who truly cares about children and education

and wants to see these children protected and feeling at ease when they are at school. On numerous occasions she has offered recommendations to the Minister of Education on how to make our schools safer for all children. She was the one to bring these issues to light in this chamber, and for that I want to applaud her, for all her hard work and perseverance on this very important subject.

This bill will not help children as much as it sounds like it could. We are in a position, as elected officials in this province, to draft and enact legislation to help the citizens of Ontario. Children are one of the most vulnerable groups in Ontario, and Bill 157 is saying, "We will help you, maybe, sort of, eventually."

My colleague has raised the issues of mandatory reporting of acts of violence in school on several occasions in this House. She has been fighting for victims of bullies since last summer. This legislation, as it is currently written, will not help victims of child-on-child violence in Ontario any more than they are right now. This legislation simply requires teachers to report incidents of serious violence to the principals, who then report it to the parents, but never to the police—and only if the principal deems it of a nature serious enough to bring to the attention of the parents. They still have the option.

We want to see any abusive situation that takes place at school reported to the parents of the victim and the police. This bill will not do that. The McGuinty Liberals may call this mandatory reporting, but nothing will change. This bill does not solve the problem of student-on-student violence in Ontario schools, and again, it's there. Student-on-student violence is in Ontario schools and we need to stop it. My colleague has repeatedly brought this issue up in the chamber because serious incidents of student-on-student violence were occurring in which the principal was aware and deliberately did not call the police. This bill would bring in mandatory reporting of incidents by teachers to principals, which is already the procedure, but would not require the principal to involve the police. The government is deliberately using the language "mandatory reporting" to mislead the press and the public into thinking that they've resolved the issues our Progressive Conservative colleague has raised.

This bill would amend the Education Act to explicitly say that the principal is not required to even notify parents of a victimized pupil if, in the opinion of the principal, doing so is not in the pupil's best interests, regardless of age. What this means is that the case of the young Muslim pupil who was sexually assaulted by a gang of five boys at C.W. Jefferys, which was uncovered as a result of the Falconer report, would not have been impacted by the passing of this bill. The principal and vice-principal would still have been able to claim to have acted in the pupil's best interests by not reporting the incident.

1710

Here are a couple of examples of incidents which my colleagues raised in the House. On June 11, 2008, my PC

colleague raised the horrific case of a six-year-old grade 1 student who was assaulted in a washroom of a York region Catholic school by two 13-year-old students. Although the principal was made aware of the assault, the abuse was not reported to the parents.

The parents found out about this from the boy's sister, who attends the same school. The six-year-old had been beaten with a belt. When the parents confronted the principal and asked if she would contact the police, the principal said no and that she had no intention of reporting the matter. The parents called the police, who charged two 13-year-old boys with assault and assault with a weapon. Clearly, the police saw who the victim was.

Again on June 11, 2008, my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora brought this issue to the Premier's attention in the Legislature after attempting to have the issue dealt with to the satisfaction of the parents and being rebuffed at the school board level. Frank Klees was contacted by the parents when they realized that no one at the local level was taking up their cause. They were concerned that their son's assault was not being taken seriously by the school board.

Another concern I have with this bill is the lack of involvement by the children's aid societies. Our party enacted legislation that made it mandatory for parents, teachers and other figures in authority to report incidents of child abuse to the children's aid society immediately. You would think that student-on-student violence would be considered in the same category; it is not. We would like to see student-on-student violence reported to the children's aid society. This is a serious flaw in the proposed legislation.

On December 11, again in 2008, the safe schools action team released their report on gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour in schools. The report recommends mandatory reporting by teachers and staff of serious incidents, like assaults, to school principals. At the press conference, the Minister of Education said that legislation to that effect would be introduced in the spring.

Yes, legislation has been introduced, but it won't change anything. If principals do not deem the incident serious enough, then they do not even have to report it to the parents. Children are still going to be victims of violence at the hands of their peers, and there are still going to be zero consequences for their actions. This legislation changes nothing.

We have heard the recommendations of the safe schools action team. Their recommendations parallel those of my Progressive Conservative colleagues:

“All school staff must report to the principal:

“—any incident that should be considered for suspension; and

“—any incident that the principal is required to report to the police, including those for which expulsion must be considered.”

The action team also recommended that, “If a school must separate students after an alleged incident, it is pre-

ferable”—preferable—“that the alleged aggressor/perpetrator ... be moved,” not the alleged victim. “Supports must be provided to the student who is required to change schools.”

Think of the Mississauga teen who was put into a co-op education program so that she would not be in the same school as her bully. This bill does not sufficiently support the needs of the victim. In her case, the aggressor was allowed to stay in school, while the victim was forced out. Not only does she feel alone at school; officials isolated her from her peers and re-victimized her by removing her from the school.

The action team lists occurrences where police should be involved in our schools. Included are hate-motivated incidents, gang-related incidents, extortion, threats of serious physical injury, and incidents of vandalism.

Another disappointing aspect of this legislation is that, if passed, it is not slated to go into effect until February of 2010. You would think that legislation surrounding a school would be based on the school year, which begins in September. We cannot waste any more time in protecting these children. Now is the time.

This government, led by a Premier who claims to be the education Premier, needs to step up to the plate, demonstrate leadership and take every possible step to protect our students. Stop treating our children as though they do not deserve justice for being victims of violent acts. Help them through their fear of going to school. Give them the confidence they need to hold their heads high in the hallways at school because they are confident that there are people out there looking out for them. Prove to them that you will protect them in their school.

We need to make sure that all our students are safe from violence at school. We cannot keep them safe with this do-nothing bill. We can keep them safe through drafting and enacting legislation that makes schools accountable for what goes on in their hallways. We can keep them safe by ensuring there are repercussions for principals and teachers who do not report incidents of student-on-student violence.

Again, I am proud to stand today and highlight some of the exceptional work my colleague from Burlington has done to make mandatory reporting a necessity in schools. We all wish we didn't need it, but the reality is out there and we read about it every day. She has time and time again told story after story of students who have been victimized in their schools, and nothing has been done. She has gone to bat for those whose voices have been silenced by violence. By the looks of this proposed legislation, she is still the only one standing up for the rights of the victim.

She has told the House about the inquiry after the death of Jordan Manners. The Liberal government failed to act in a timely manner this case. If the inquiry we requested had been launched within a reasonable time frame, law enforcement would have unearthed the assault cover-up of a six-year-old girl, and the police could have held those responsible to account, as they wanted to. As

the statute of limitations had expired, the police were unable to proceed.

After the Minister of Education outright denied any wrongdoing, my colleague again stood up and said there was no excuse for not implementing mandatory reporting. The minister danced around the question and did not provide the victims or their families any solace that their pain, in the hands of student aggressors, would be lessened.

On another occasion, my colleague brought up the issue—this time with a gallery full of parents and students who had suffered from student-on-student abuse. My colleague asked the minister why she and the Liberals continued to silence the voices of those who desperately need a voice, desperately need a champion and desperately need protection. She asked, “When will you face the facts and finally implement mandatory reporting in your schools?” The minister’s only response was that she was sorry for the students in the gallery dealing with their difficult situation. Difficult situation? Try on the feeling of going to school, a supposed safe haven, and getting kicked. Try being called names, try being isolated, try the labels, try the hate, and then tell me about difficult situations.

As adults in the workplace, there are systems in place to ensure that things like this do not happen. We have human resources. We are encouraged to create a work environment free of hate and abuse. We can be terminated if it’s found that accusations are true. We have accountability; we have consequences. Right now, there are no consequences, no repercussions. As it stands today, youth in Ontario have been failed.

We need to work toward making sure that all our students will be safe from their abusers. We need to establish clear rules for the creation and enforcement of safety plans following incidents of violence and abuse. We need to remember that we have failed children like those who have stepped forward recently to tell their stories. We have failed countless other children who have not been able to step forward for fear of consequences they will face from their bullies at school.

Parents and children should not have to fight alone. They need to be backed up. They need us, as elected officials, to stand up for them and say, “There is something wrong here, and we need to fix it.” We need to act as their human resources, their voice in this fight. Regrettably, many of these parents and their children have been let down, and as we know from the stories we’re hearing, children and their lives have been put at risk. We’ve heard the stories. Again, I say to you that this has been heartbreaking for any parent, and I can’t imagine what the impact must have been on the children and their families. We want every serious incident of violence and abuse to be reported to the parents and to the proper authorities. We want to make sure that an action plan is put in place immediately and enforced. It has to happen for the sake of the students.

We also need to provide help to the children who are perpetrating the offences. We need to take whatever

action we can with the children, and we need to support those children too. Children who are nine years of age or anywhere younger or older are too young to be tarred with the brush of a deviant. The children deserve our help; they deserve counselling and support systems to resolve and monitor their issues now so that we won’t see these children later in the system, in one form or another, for the rest of their lives.

1720

I want to tell the story of someone I know who suffered at the hands of a bully at school. She was in grade 7 when it all began. She was tormented by a peer. The teachers and principal knew it was going on. They were actually scared of the student and her mother and therefore did not do anything to stop the abuse. One day the student was almost killed by the bully. There were no consequences for the bully, not even a one-hour detention.

It didn’t stop there. She spent the rest of her school year faking sick a lot to stay home, her parents pleading every day with the principal to do something about this. The torment continued at home, where the phone rang constantly, with hang-ups and obscenities. The torture went on for one full school year. As you can imagine, she wound up with low self-esteem, withdrawn and anti-social.

Eventually, though, she came out of it. She went to high school and became involved in groups and committees that had a wide social circle. Then it all began again, but with a different group of girls. She was tormented, called names and had things thrown at her in class. She was attacked at a courthouse in the bathroom, on a school field trip. No one did anything to help her, so no one came to her defence. She told the school guidance counsellor, who did nothing except tell the bullies that they had been reported.

This girl was tortured because she was smart and chose not to party with them in high school but to work, study and save money for her education.

While today she is in her 20s and has moved on from the abuse at the hands of her peers, there are still the lingering effects of bullying. Cases like this happen. This is real. We need to create productive legislation that will help students feel less like victims and more like survivors; more like they have the power, not the abuser.

Bill 157, as it is written, has our schools and our students used as pawns in a political game. We can do better, and our children deserve better. I would hope that the Liberals listen and make the amendments necessary to improve Bill 157.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I listened intently to the member from Dufferin—Caledon, and I thank her for her remarks. What I would like to say is that we have been talking about Bill 157 and we’ve been saying that, if passed, Ontario would be the first province in Canada with legislation of this kind. But I also wanted to add to the record some of the things that we have already done to make sure that our schools are safe.

We amended Bill 212 to include bullying as a suspendible offence. We annualized \$23 million for suspension and expulsion programs. We annualized \$10.5 million to support professional resources: more attendance counsellors, and psychologists. We annualized \$10 million for additional supports for urban and priority schools. We put \$6 million in the focus on youth program, \$1 million for Kids Help Phone, and \$4 million to boards for training on safe, equitable and inclusion schools.

The introduction of this bill is yet another example of leadership in education, and I hope that the members of this House will pass this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I very much appreciate the comments on Bill 157 from the member from Dufferin—Caledon. There are a number of issues in this bill that I have concern about.

First of all, if you look at subsection 300.3(3), “A principal shall not notify a parent or guardian of a pupil if in the opinion of the principal doing so would put the pupil at risk of harm from a parent or guardian....”

Now, what that does is it actually emphasizes that the principal has control over the actions of the family. And the concern that I have here, quite frankly, is that in some incidents, principals have gone off school grounds—and I know in specific cases, because I’ve dealt with them throughout the year—and then taken authority on those individuals without being on school grounds. And there’s nothing stated in this legislation, the boundaries by which a principal can establish that.

Not only that, but if you look at subsection 3(1)(0.1) on page 3, “Every board shall establish policies and guidelines with respect to delegation by principals, under section 300.1....”

The difficulty with that is you’re getting different guidelines in each area. In our riding, for example, we have a number of different boards that will have different guidelines. So what has taken place in one particular incident with one student whom I’m dealing with currently, where the individual is in high school, is that the individuals who got involved in a particular situation have now been disbanded to different boards and different schools which are now subject to different guidelines. There needs to be consistency throughout the province.

We have to maintain the family unit as a family unit. If there are difficulties and problems, don’t give that principal the discretion to decide what is right for that family and what is not. The family needs to make those decisions, and that’s where the decisions should continue to be.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I do want to talk about the fact that the principal is given some discretion in reporting to the parents, and I would like to repeat once again the story that I told first of all in my remarks, which is about the student—it was multiple students, but one student in

particular whom we spoke to who was being bullied at school and was the victim of homophobic bullying. This student happened to have parents who were separated. When the father, with whom the student was living, found out that the student was lesbian, that young lady was thrown out of the home by that parent. When the mother found out, the student was thrown out for the second time by the mother.

Why, I ask you, would we want to force a principal, with no discretion, to make a call to a parent if the student says, “Please don’t call my parent. I’ll get thrown out. I’ll get beaten up”? Why would we inflict that on a student, particularly secondary students who will have some understanding? I understand that if you’ve got a little six- or seven-year-old, you need to talk to the parent. But when we’re dealing with teenagers, we do need to give some credence to what the teenager is saying about the family setting. That is why we are providing some discretion for the principal. It is exactly as the bill says: If there is going to be further harm occurring, then we don’t want further harm coming to the student. If in fact—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

The member for Dufferin—Caledon, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: As I said at the beginning of my remarks on Bill 157, the Education Amendment Act (Keeping Our Kids Safe at School) will unfortunately not live up to the name in the title. I think we had a real opportunity with Bill 157 to bring forward some substantive changes that would improve the lives of children in Ontario, children who are trying to deal with bullying in the schools, peer-on-peer violence, and I think it’s an opportunity that will be lost if we don’t bring forward amendments and improve Bill 157, because there is an opportunity for us to improve how our children are being treated in school and how they are learning. So I will leave it at, we need the amendments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I don’t think there’s any subject that draws the emotion of a community to the forefront as much as when you’re speaking about education and when school communities get together to discuss some of the things that are happening within their school community. I think that, out of all the things we do in the various stages we go through in life, the years that we spend in school and the years that we spend as parents are probably some of the most memorable, and it really adds some definition and meaning to our life. So when an issue comes forward such as Bill 157, which is intended to keep our kids safe in those schools, I think it’s something that all members of this House should pay attention to.

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I’ve got a terrific community where I live in Oakville, and a terrific riding. I know that Ontario is a place where people really have strong values when it comes to public

education, and there's probably nowhere that is more demonstrated in the province than in my own community of Oakville. We have people who have moved to Oakville from all over the world, and a lot of the reason they have moved here is for the quality of the public education system that we have right here in our community.

So when I see Bill 157 come forward, what it says to me is, "I belong to a government that takes school safety issues very, very seriously and wants to do the best it can do to make sure that when our kids go off to school in the morning"—whether they're walking to school or taking the school bus, when they go off, parents want to have the confidence that their children, their students, are safe. What I think our educators need and expect of their government and have asked of their government is legislation that allows for that to happen. They want a framework put around the ability of that school, of that community to ensure that all participants in the education system are safe on a daily basis.

So that's the reason for this being here. I think it speaks to the quality of Ontario citizens as parents, as educators and simply as human beings—grandparents would be included in that—that they expect the institutions that children attend on a daily basis to be places where they won't get bullied; where, if their sexual orientation perhaps isn't the same as the majority of the other students, that won't become an issue and a cause for violence; that they won't be harassed, troubled, bullied; that they'll be allowed to fulfill their full potential and partake in the educational system for the reason that it was intended, and that is to make people more productive members of our society and to allow our society to move forward. That's what contributes to the lifestyle that we have here in the province of Ontario. There's a lifestyle that I think is envied throughout the world, and part of that fabric is the public education system.

So obviously, there are some reasons for this legislation coming forward. People have expressed concerns in the past. In my own community—I've got schools in my own neighbourhood—I think of St. Dominic and Eastview, both within a five-minute drive from my house. One is in the public system and one in the separate system. From time to time, you hear about problems that have arisen in those schools where teachers have been called in to deal with situations that perhaps they didn't have to deal with in the past. I think of other schools, like Pine Grove, in my own community, a French immersion school—same issues. The same things need to be dealt with on a daily basis.

This legislation that is being passed is going to enshrine mandatory reporting. It's going to give some framework and some substance that tells the school staff and the principals just what's expected of them when these incidents arise. Now, we would all like to sit here today and hope that these incidents would not arise, but I think experience has shown us over the years that from time to time, inappropriate behaviour will surface in our

schools. It's a fact of life and it's something we'd like to limit, but I think what we need to have is a strong framework that explains what the consequences of that are. What we are saying is that in some circumstances, this could result in expulsion. In some circumstances, it could result in suspension. But it sets a firm framework around that so that the people we trust to educate our children on a daily basis understand what their actions should be and what their society expects of them and, through this government activity, they will know what to do on a daily basis.

We don't want to see violence in the schools. We don't want to see some of the vandalism we've seen on our school properties in the past. We don't want schools to become places where you go and buy drugs. So there has to be a consequence attached to that. That's what's going to make our schools safe. That's what's going to make our schools places where young people are able to go and get the education that they want. This enshrines the ability of the principals to delegate that authority to a VP or to even another teacher who's responsible for discipline and safety in those schools.

When you look at these proposals that are being brought forward today, it really speaks highly of our community. It really speaks highly, I think, of all of us as parents. All of us, as students at one time in our lives, attended schools. If we thought back deeply enough, we probably could think of examples of where we have witnessed bullying ourselves, where we have witnessed another student perhaps being called a name because they were of a different race or because they were of a different sexual orientation. Perhaps some of the young people who are here today as pages can think of experiences that they've had in their own schools when they have seen this type of activity taking place. I think that young people would like to know that there's accountability for that: that if that inappropriate behaviour takes place, somehow there's a system in place that's going to deal with that; that the person who has perpetrated that incident isn't going to get off with it; that it's not going to be allowed, that it's not going to be condoned; and that those students who attend school on a daily basis because they want to learn, in such places as Oakville Trafalgar High School in Oakville, for example—it's got a wonderful reputation throughout the province of Ontario. When you see the EQAO scores that are listed for my community, in Oakville, they're very good scores. It's something we're all proud of, as a community. But all that goes for naught if those schools aren't safe places to be. Although we have some incidents in Oakville, I don't think that they would be typical. But certainly they do arise from time to time, and we need a system that's going to deal with them.

We have some wonderful French immersion schools in our community. We have some English single-track schools, and we have dual-track schools, each of them providing the level of education that the parents have deemed that they would like to see their children receive. We have some francophone schools, both in the public

and the Catholic boards, and we have a large number of private schools. Bill 157, the Keeping Our Kids Safe at School act, will allow for all of those schools to understand that the provincial government has expectations of them and that the parents who have children at those schools are allowed to exercise that authority through their government and give firm direction to the administrators and the teachers of those schools as to what they should do should an incident arise.

What I particularly like about Bill 157 is that we're moving very, very quickly on this, because we understand that it's an issue that needs to be addressed very quickly. In December, late last year, the report came forward. We introduced Bill 157 on March 12 of this year. The reading is now occurring one week after the introduction. If the bill is passed—and I hope the House chooses to pass the bill—it's going to take a little bit of time over the summer to ensure that all the school staff are trained, and we simply can't do that over the summer. We understand that's something that needs to take place when the school session is in.

I've heard some suggestions from the opposition as to how this could be improved, perhaps—that's the role of opposition—and I hope that the minister is listening. I also hope that when it goes to the committee, it will receive due consideration, as it should.

I think when you look at the intent behind the bill, it's inarguable that it's in the best interests of the students in our community. It's inarguable that it's in the best interests of the public education system, which we're all proud of in this province, that this bill be passed as quickly as possible so that the people we entrust with the education of our young people can continue to provide the educational quality that they have in the past and also make the institutions where that education takes place places that each and every one of us in this House would be proud to send our children.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's always a pleasure to enter the debate on the mandatory reporting bill. Of course, it is the third time I've had an opportunity to address this bill today, and not a lot has changed from speaker to speaker. Again, as my good colleague from Thornhill pointed out, it always gives me an opportunity to talk about the legislation I put forward on November—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): As a matter of fact, it doesn't give you that opportunity. You have to speak, according to standing order 25, to the matter that's before the House.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the mandatory reporting bill and talk about my vision and passion, as it was included in the previous bill that I tabled before this Legislature in November, which will be debated on April 23, 2009, discussing mandatory reporting. Of course, we all know, as I have indicated in this chamber several times, this initiative has been brought forward based on the great work that my colleague Joyce Savoline has done for the children of this province.

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Of course, mandatory reporting is something that we have been calling for in the official opposition, and through the great work that my colleague Joyce Savoline has done, many people have been here in this chamber working to see a solution to the problem of bullying and other challenges our children are facing on school property.

We have some concerns with this legislation. I look forward to discussing this legislation tomorrow with my caucus colleagues in the official opposition under the great leadership of Joyce Savoline, the MPP for Burlington. Of course, I look forward, again, to discussing mandatory reporting on April 23, 2009, when we discuss Bill 130.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to add my comments to the member from Oakville. I want to tell you right off that I will be supporting Bill 157.

When we think about sending our children off to school every day, we think about how important it is that we, as a legislative body, ensure that our children are safe. We know that the environment that produces the best education, the best foundation for their roots to grow strong, must be a safe environment. So by going forward with mandatory reporting, this is part of the protocols that will be established to ensure that we are, within our legislative responsibilities, making sure that there's a mechanism to recognize when issues are happening in our school systems.

I know that, as a parent, when you send your children off to school for the very first day, you make sure that their lunchbox, or bag, I guess it is now, and everything is all polished up, and their food, and one of the things you do think of is how your child will work within the environment. Is it a place where they will be able to grow? When I hear comments from the member for Oakville in support and the reasons for it, I feel quite confident, and I know that the people of Ontario will be confident in sending their children off to school and that we are doing everything we can to ensure that the environment remains as productive as possible.

Thank you for allowing me just a couple of minutes to speak to such a very important bill. I look forward to having a further opportunity down the road to speak at length.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Regarding Bill 157 once again, the member opposite just finished mentioning that we know our students are safe and, quite frankly, it's a Big-Brother-watching scenario.

Once upon a time in the province of Ontario, I can remember when there used to be rinks at every school because they took the time to put them in. Now we can't have rinks. The principals don't want them because of the liability issue. Not only that, but the playgrounds are removed from the schools because the current system

will not allow it to take place. Here it is, Big Brother watching again, and guess what? We can't slide on the ice in the schools anymore because somebody is going to get hurt. Believe me, I deal with it on a regular basis. They go out for recess and it's, "Everybody stand there and behave yourself." Let's go like robots and stand there and do a real good job. Quite frankly, I believe the family unit needs to be informed and has to be informed on situations that occur on school property; otherwise, Big Brother continues to be watching.

Here we are, turning over responsibility to the principals to make sure they're making the right decision in the family unit because they're going to grow up in a safe environment. Well, the member opposite spoke about the incident at the school. Do you not think those parents should find out or will find out at some stage in their life? Do you not think they should be given the right or the responsibility to know? Yet, we are taking away that responsibility once again. We continue to do that on a regular basis. I have some strong concerns with that because I don't believe it's in the best interests of the students and the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to add my comments to this bill. I just want to start off by reading a quote from the president of the Ontario Principals' Council, and I think this kind of sums it up best. She said that it is "important to have preventive measures, but visible adult supervision is often the best deterrent of bullying and school violence." How can you quarrel with that?

As the member for Oakville said, this is an action that's important to everybody. It's certainly important to the parents and students at places like Meadowvale Secondary, Streetsville Secondary, St. Joseph's in the riding of Mississauga—Streetsville, and also at Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Meadowvale.

This government moved very quickly on this particular issue, and I think it's important enough to reiterate: We received the report in December, just before Christmas. How long did it take for the government to get going? As soon as the House reconvened. Bill 157 was introduced on March 2, and second reading is now occurring a week after introduction. How much quicker does it get?

If passed, this bill would take some time to ensure that school staff are trained. In other words, it's going to be done right, and we can't do all this over the summer.

There are a couple of points that are worthy of making in the last couple of seconds here. One point that people have sometimes asked is, "Does the report get to the root causes of inappropriate behaviour?" What it does is require school staff to intervene in all cases of disrespectful and inappropriate student behaviour as long as it's safe to do so.

For schools such as St. Aloysius Gonzaga and John Fraser Secondary in western Mississauga, and for West Credit Secondary and St. Joan of Arc and Stephen Lewis, this is the kind of bill that we need, and need right now.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Oakville, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I really appreciate some of the comments I've heard. Obviously, there are going to be some differences of opinion. As I said in my opening remarks, there probably is nothing that draws the emotion out of people as much as when you talk about school issues and children's issues. Anything that involves the education of our young people brings people's passions to the front, and that's a good thing.

Some of the constructive suggestions that have been offered are worthwhile for consideration. Some of them, perhaps, I wouldn't agree with, but the opposition is exercising its right to bring them forward.

For parents, it's a sign that our society is changing. In the past, it would have been the societal norm that if you were being bullied, you just suffered in silence. Somehow, you got through that; somehow, you dealt with it yourself. What we're saying is that that simply is not acceptable anymore; that somewhere within the educational system there needs to be a way of dealing with people who are suffering the effects of gender-based violence, homophobia perhaps, sexual harassment, or inappropriate behaviour. A young person who is going through that, a young member of our society, has the right to our protection. I don't think that's being Big Brother at all. I think that's being a human being to another human being. That's the sort of relationship we should expect from each other. It's the sort of relationship we expect from each other as family members, as members of society, and certainly something we should see exhibited within our school system.

I wouldn't say it's overdue, but I'd say its time has come. It is a signal that, as a society, we've come to recognize a problem that has been ignored for far too long. Bill 157 is going to change that and should be supported as quickly as possible.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the opportunity to yet again speak to Bill 157, the Education Amendment Act (Keeping Our Kids Safe at School). Mr. Speaker, as you know, I think that we should be keeping all the kids safe in Ontario.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the reaction I'm getting from the members of the government. I know they're as excited to address this piece of legislation as I am.

I must admit that this is something that we have been working on in this chamber as the official opposition, so we look forward to working with the government to ensure that the appropriate process is put in place by which parents and educators will be able to properly notify one another when a child needs help.

I will say, though, that this legislation isn't exactly what we had in mind for mandatory reporting, or what we have been calling for. At this point, without substantive amendments, it won't help to protect Ontario's

students any more than they are today. We would like to see any abuse incidents that take place at school reported unequivocally to the parent of the victim and the police. That's exactly what Bill 130 calls for, the Children's Safety and Protection Rights Act, 2008, which I put forward in November of last year. Unfortunately, the bill before us is much weaker than the provision contained in Bill 130, which will be debated on April 23.

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Now, just because you're calling for mandatory reporting, that doesn't solve the problem. My colleague from Oshawa pointed that out earlier. We have real problems on our school grounds, and I think it goes without saying that just because a protocol is introduced, that doesn't mean that it is the same as it would be as if it were the law. This simply requires teachers to report violence to the principal, who would then report it to the parents but not to police. I don't have to remind this chamber of the horrific story brought forward by the MPP from Burlington as well as the MPP from Whitby—Oshawa on an issue—I think, a very severe issue—which occurred on school grounds in my seatmate's riding.

Ontario students and their parents deserve better. They deserve the proper protections. Our party raised the issue of mandatory reporting last summer with regard to a number of serious incidents taking place on public school grounds in which the principal was aware of the incident, but in these cases deliberately neglected to contact the police. That's why we in the official opposition believe that this bill, Bill 157, should contain the same strength that Bill 130 does in dealing with mandatory reporting. This bill will bring in mandatory reporting of incidents by teachers to principals, which is already a procedure, but would not require the principal to phone police. The government is deliberately using this language of "mandatory reporting" so that the press and the public will believe they are solving the issue and that they have resolved the issues that this party, the official opposition, has raised in the province of Ontario.

Also, this bill would amend the Education Act to explicitly say that the principal is not required to even notify the parents of a victimized pupil if it, "in the opinion of the principal doing so ... is not in the pupil's best interests," regardless of age. I have a problem with that. I think that we need to be very clear. I think a parent knows what's best for their child. There's no other arbiter in this chamber, nor in any other classroom, who can say what is best for the child of a parent. I speak as a mother myself. What I'm concerned about and what this means is that the case of the young Muslim pupil who was sexually assaulted by a gang of five at C.W. Jefferys, which was uncovered as a result of the Falconer report, would not have been impacted by the passing of this bill. That's quite serious. I'm glad that the chamber has quieted. But the incident that happened at C.W. Jefferys and that was reported in the Falconer report needs to be addressed. It means that children whom we ought to be protecting, and giving their parents and the police more

tools, won't be addressed in this, and I think it would be very relevant at committee that that be addressed. The principal and vice-principals would still have been able to claim in that particular case to have acted in the pupil's best interests by not reporting the incident.

On March 4, a six-year-old grade 1 student was assaulted in a washroom of a York region Catholic school by two 13-year-old students. Although the principal was made aware of the assault, she did not report it to parents. The parents found out about this from the boy's sister, who attends the same school. The six-year-old boy had been beaten with a belt. When the parents confronted the principal and asked if she would contact the police, the principal said no and that she had no intention of reporting the matter. The parents called the police, who have charged the two 13-year-old boys with assault and assault with a weapon. This is happening in our schools here in Ontario.

On June 11, 2008, my colleague the member for Newmarket–Aurora, Frank Klees, brought the issue to the Premier's attention in the Legislature after his attempts to have the issue dealt with at the school to the satisfaction of the parents who were affected were rebuffed by the school board, at that school board level. Mr. Klees was then contacted by the parents when they realized that no one at the local level was taking up their case. The Child and Family Services Act of Ontario states that child abuse at the hands of a parent or a person in authority must be reported to the police or the CAS, but there is no legal requirement to report abuse or violence at the hands of another student. That's a serious flaw in the legislation.

Again, I think there is room for improvement in this legislation. My colleague the MPP from Burlington has brought forward some very serious issues in this chamber on student-on-student violence that need to be addressed. I feel privileged to be able to debate this very important legislation today. I feel honoured that so many child advocate groups have endorsed my bill, Bill 130, to ensure that there are more protections in place for children in this province than there are today, after that bill will be passed, hopefully, with the support of my colleagues and all sides of this chamber.

But as I draw to a close, I want to encourage the minister to look at this legislation and to make it as strong as it possibly can be, because I believe, as do my colleagues in the official opposition, that mandatory reporting by principals or other educators to police will help us prevent more abuses on school grounds.

Please accept my thanks for the opportunity to debate Bill 157, and I look forward to hearing questions and comments.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It being very near 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until Tuesday, March 24, at 9 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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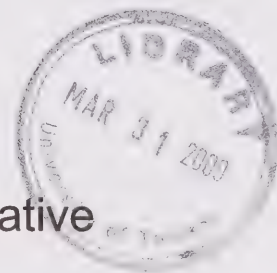
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First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 39^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Tuesday 24 March 2009

Mardi 24 mars 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 24 March 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 24 mars 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the aboriginal prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

POVERTY REDUCTION ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA RÉDUCTION DE LA PAUVRETÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 5, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario / Projet de loi 152, Loi concernant une stratégie à long terme de réduction de la pauvreté en Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Mauro: Good morning, and thank you very much. I'm pleased to have 10 minutes this morning to make a few remarks on Bill 152, our government's poverty reduction strategy.

I think it's important for us to mention that when we were first elected in 2003, we realized quite quickly, as a government, that there was a lot of work that needed to be done in respect to poverty reduction in the province of Ontario. I think it's fair to say that we had inherited a history of some regression or neglect in this regard.

The previous administration, beginning in 1995 to 2003, had made some significant reductions—I think that's acknowledged by most people in this Legislature—in 1995 or 1996, seeing an approximate 21% reduction in social assistance rates almost immediately, and then, going forward until approximately 2003, no inflationary increases attached to social assistance rates in the province of Ontario.

So what we saw when we came to government in 2003 was that there was a significant amount of work to be done. We feel that we have, as a government, taken positive steps in this regard. I'm sure there's no one on our side of the House who wouldn't suggest that there is more work yet to be done, but we do feel that we have made significant strides in terms of trying to address what had been some neglect over the last number of years upon our arrival to government.

One of the significant policy pieces, while there are many, and legislative pieces that we've brought forward

since forming government in 2003—I think it's fair to say that most of our members, if not all of them, and I think perhaps even some members on the other side, would suggest that the main plank and the main policy piece that we brought forward to try and address poverty in the province of Ontario would be our Ontario child benefit, brought forward by the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I know it's a piece that that minister has worked very hard on, obviously, with the leadership and direction of Premier McGuinty. We have managed to bring forward what we feel is the single most important piece in terms of addressing poverty in Ontario.

Like many members in the Legislature, just this past Friday, I had an opportunity to make a wonderful announcement. I think most members likely did the same. What we were able to announce—and, of course, this will be subject, should this be contained in the budget, to passage of the budget. What we will see, should it be contained in there or anywhere else going forward, with the support of the Legislative Assembly, will be significant increases on the OCB from where it currently sits, at \$600, up to in the order of magnitude of \$1,100.

This was originally intended to max out at about \$1,300 per year per child in the province of Ontario for those who are eligible, but what we see going forward is that this \$1,100 watershed mark will be ramped up and moved forward by approximately two years. Originally, moving from \$600 up into the \$1,100 range was not intended to be met until approximately 2010 or 2011, so on a go-forward basis, it is our hope that with the support of the Legislative Assembly, we are able to fast track that piece and move it forward.

As I said in my opening remarks, it's extremely important that we're able to do that. We have a long history here, going back to 1995—and some would say even earlier; 1992 or 1993—where several of these issues that are fundamental to addressing poverty in Ontario had not been addressed. In fact, not only had they not been addressed, but some would say that they had gone backwards. So the 21% reduction that I mentioned, in 1995 or 1996, is a significant piece that we have to address going forward.

I will tell you that what I really like about the Ontario child benefit is that it's not just about people on social assistance, but it also captures those whom we refer to often in this place as the working poor. I can tell you that shortly after the election in 2003, I, like many members in the assembly, would have people coming into my office discussing poverty reduction issues. Most of the time, the conversations would focus primarily on—and

justifiably so to some degree—people on social assistance in the province. I would respond to them, “Well, what about the working poor?” That was 2003-04.

That’s why I want to tell you that I’m extremely proud of what we’ve done with the work on the Ontario child benefit, because as most members have come to realize, the OCB does capture people who are the working poor. They will be eligible for it. It’s clearly laid out in terms of who’s eligible, what benchmarks are available for people to begin receiving the Ontario child benefit. So it’s a very significant policy piece. I’m thrilled, as I think most are, that it’s not just about people on social assistance, but it also captures the working poor.

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, there are a significant number of other policy pieces that we have brought forward over the course of the last five, going on six years that we feel are significant and important in terms of addressing poverty reduction in Ontario. One of those that I’d like to touch on briefly here today is our affordable housing program. I can give you some wonderful numbers in terms of what it has achieved directly in my hometown of Thunder Bay and my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Under the affordable housing program, the Thunder Bay District Social Services Administration Board for the northern homeowner repair program received \$5 million to address housing repairs for 250 northern housing units. These, of course, are for people who own their own homes; again not simply addressing people who are on social assistance, but the working poor.

In the riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, I can report to you the progress on that particular program. As of January 30, 2009, 152 units were approved, for a total of almost \$2.9 million under the affordable housing program: 70 units are occupied and 82 units are under repair and construction. The link, of course, with this program to poverty reduction in the province of Ontario is that these are the working poor. These are people who own their own homes, and these repairs, under our affordable housing program and the northern homeowner repair program, will allow the working poor to retrofit their homes, and we think they will see significant reductions in the costs associated with owning their own homes when it comes to gas, energy costs of all sorts, insulation and windows that will help reduce their costs to maintain and live in their own homes. It’s a very significant piece, and we’re obviously very proud of it.

That program has just had an extension, I can tell you, in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan to August 2009, to allow the Thunder Bay District Social Assistance Administration Board to get more of the units out the door and ensure that this money is not left on the table. So we’re working very closely with them to ensure that as many people as possible have an opportunity to tap into this program.

Another one of the pieces that we feel is significant in terms of addressing poverty reduction is our rent bank program. Again, I can give you local examples from my Thunder Bay DSSAB. Our district social services admin-

istration board was allocated almost \$300,000, which has, to this point, prevented just about 260 evictions. In 2004 the allocation was \$132,000; in 2006, \$56,000; in 2007, \$27,000; and in 2008, \$75,000. Almost \$300,000, it is estimated, that the money under the rent bank has delivered, which has avoided 260 evictions in Thunder Bay–Atikokan. I’m sure the numbers across the entire province are obviously much larger than that.

0910

One of the other things I’d like to highlight in my last minute and a half or so is our work as a government when it comes to employment insurance. It’s obviously a federal program, but something that I think we’ve seen very recently, perhaps in the last four or five months, finally gain some broader-based provincial and national traction in Canada. For, I would say, at least three years, under the leadership of Premier McGuinty, our government has been advocating strongly to the federal government that the disparities in the way the employment insurance program is rolled out in Canada, specifically in the province of Ontario, are unfair and discriminate against workers in this province. We have been leading this fight, I would say, for at least three years now here in the province. When we first began talking about this, we were portrayed as simply blaming some of our problems on the federal government. It’s nice to see, since the federal government has finally woken up to the challenges that exist in Canada, that they too, as a federal government, federal parties—and other parties, I should say now, in the province of Ontario—I think are finally on side in terms of this fight. I think it’s fair to repeat that it was Premier McGuinty who began this fight fully three years ago. I’ve presented petitions in this Legislature in that regard going back a couple of years, and I know many other members have as well.

This is a significant part of our reduction strategy as well. We’re happy to see that it’s finally being recognized and acknowledged by other parties and by the national government, and we look forward to seeing more positive work on that as we move forward.

I see that my time is up. I’m pleased to have had an opportunity this morning to do my 10 minutes on Bill 152, and I’m thrilled that we are doing what we’re doing. I thank the Minister of Children and Youth Services for all of her great work, especially on the Ontario child benefit. I know she’s very proud of that particular piece and I was pleased to present that to my community of Thunder Bay–Atikokan on Friday.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I’m pleased to have a moment to add some comments to the speech from the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan talking about Bill 152, the poverty reduction bill that doesn’t seem to have a plan in it. Now, the member was talking about past governments and about “significant regression”—I think that was his exact terminology—back under the past PC government. I would say to him, we’re talking about poverty. What about the lost 300,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs

that we've seen under your watch? What about those jobs? What about your attack on business in this province that you seem to be carrying on relentlessly, going after one sector after another? Most recently, I just learned about another sector that is under attack by this government, and that is the small bus companies that run the school buses in this province. You've now brought in an RFP process. I was talking to operators in my riding last week, and you're forcing these very small companies that have had bus routes for years and years and years to now engage in a request-for-proposal process. What do you think is going to happen with that? Well, I'll tell you what I think is going to happen—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I think I know what it is, and I would ask the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka how this relates to the speech that was given by the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Mr. Norm Miller: It relates to the fact that this government is continuing to cause further poverty by causing other businesses to no longer be able to stay in business in this province. What this government is doing is forcing these small bus companies that have had small routes—and I see I have eight seconds left, so I won't be able to fully explain my point now, but I will, at another opportunity, expand on the point I was about to make.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: The member for Thunder Bay has presented us with, I think, a very well researched, well-rounded explanation of this particular bill. I'd like to add a couple of comments to it.

One of the intangibles that is one of the government's greatest accomplishments in its campaign against poverty is to restore something called hope. It's no longer an economic crime to need help. The list of the accomplishments that the member stated give people who need help at a crucial point in their time a really good overview of some of the ways in which the province of Ontario can look at them and say, "We are all part of the same family of Ontarians. If you need help, you're one of us. If you need help, we'll help you."

I want to touch on just a few of them. I want to talk about affordable housing. Last summer, I had an opportunity at one of the affordable housing complexes in Streetsville, Fletcher's Creek Co-op, at the corner of Bristol and Creditview, to look at a development taking a set of older town homes and going through them and replacing the roofs, replacing the windows. The homeowners were telling us in detail about the difference it was going to make in not having frost on the inside of their windows and not having snow blow through some of the cracks in the walls. That project was completed on time and on budget. For those people who really needed the help that Fletcher's Creek Co-op provides, this government's activity, this government's initiatives, made their lives easier. That's one of the reasons that I think this is a good measure. That's one of the reasons why I'll support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Frank Klees: In response to the comments made by the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan, I would like to remind the member that when the previous government about which he commented took office, there was a \$12-billion deficit in this province. One in 10 people were on welfare. There was no industrial activity taking place. Ontario was in fact at the bottom of the list of provinces in terms of economic activity. When his government took office in 2003, there were in fact renewed activity and economic development activities taking place in the province. There were the fewest number of people on welfare at any point in the history of this province. Today, the welfare rolls are on the climb again. We are facing an \$18-billion deficit, which is the highest that this province has ever seen, there are more people living in poverty today in this province than ever before in the history of this province, and this member and this government have no plan whatsoever.

Today, we're debating a bill that is hollow rhetoric. There is nothing in this bill that will do anything about poverty. So I say to the member, before you stand in your place and wax eloquent about the failings of the previous government, please have a very careful analysis of your performance as a government and ask yourself carefully, what is it that people in poverty in this province will have as a result of this hollow piece of legislation that we're debating today?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I would like to just recognize the remarks of some of our opponents over there, who no doubt are practising some of their leadership speeches coming up in June.

I think probably it's best illustrative of the fundamental difference between the approach that this government has and other governments have taken in that we don't engage in wedge politics. We try not to divide and rule, but actually govern for all Ontarians. That's why, for example, initiatives such as the increase of the child benefit are going to be particularly beneficial to modest-income-area ridings such as my own, Etobicoke North. I know, for example, that individuals, especially during this time of manufacturing job sector challenge and economic downturn, are going to be especially challenged in times going forward. But is our approach to hire Andersen Consulting on how to rid the welfare rolls—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to caution the member for Etobicoke North and ask how this relates back to the speech that was given by the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I'd be honoured to, Speaker. The way this relates, sir, is with regard to poverty reduction, which is of course on the agenda, and the approach that current governments take and previous governments took—which, by the way, is in direct reply to the two minutes preceding me. I hope that's suitable to you, Mr. Speaker.

0920

Having said that, as I say, the approach that this government takes is one of inclusivity, of attempting to in-

crease opportunities, whether it's investments in education or with our social support network. I thank you for this opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'll now return to the member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan, who has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'd like to thank the members from Parry Sound—Muskoka, Mississauga—Streetsville, Newmarket—Aurora and Etobicoke North.

One of the members, in their response to my 10 minutes, mentioned that when they came to government, they inherited about a \$12-billion deficit and that there were people on assistance and they needed to find a way to address that. I guess that was the justification for the 21% reduction in social assistance rates in the province of Ontario.

What the member forgot to mention was that when we came to government in 2003, we found ourselves in a very similar circumstance. In fact, we also inherited a deficit of \$5.6 billion, but that deficit was not acknowledged until maybe three days before election day. Our circumstances were similar; the only difference is that, even under similar circumstances, when we came to government we still found a capacity under which to address social justice issues. Some governments find the capacity to do it; others ignore it. The circumstances were similar. We took a different path.

As I said in my remarks, this is not just about the Ontario child benefit. Since 2003, we've addressed significant policy pieces that will help people who are finding themselves in challenging circumstances in the province of Ontario. I mentioned briefly a rent bank; I didn't mention the energy bank. I didn't have an opportunity in my 10 minutes to talk about minimum wage. I didn't have an opportunity to talk about providing free immunization for people in the province of Ontario. I talked about the northern home repair program. I didn't have an opportunity to talk about baby screening. We talked a bit about social housing. We didn't talk about the increases we brought in to Ontario Works and Ontario disability support payments. We didn't talk about the increases that we brought in to injured workers for the first time in about 10 or 15 years in the province of Ontario, or the infrastructure that we've invested in to help keep taxes low for people.

There's a lot that we've done, and I think that most people in this place acknowledge it. We took a different path.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to participate in this debate.

I find it quite odd that the member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan stood in his place and advised the House that it's unfortunate he didn't have the time to talk about all of the wonderful things, and then he enumerated a half dozen areas that he should have or could have elaborated. Well, he had another 10 minutes on the clock. Why didn't he choose to take the 20 minutes allotted to him and let us know what his government has done or intends

to do? But the reason he chose to cut himself off from that time is because he knows that the things he would talk about are, in fact, hollow rhetoric, that there is no plan, and that when he begins to talk a little longer than 10 minutes, the substance starts to wane. So what we will do over the next 20 minutes—I'll take my full 20, and I will talk about this bill, Bill 152.

I want to talk about the five action words that are contained in this bill. Stakeholders from across the province who are listening to this debate, and who are listening to the spin of this government as to what they're going to do to fight poverty, will find only five action words in this entire piece of legislation. I want to share them with you, and then I'll deal with them one at a time. The action words contained in this legislation are as follows: (1) publish; (2) consult; (3) review; (4) inform; and (5) solicit. Those are the action words contained in this legislation. There is nothing more than that.

I would submit to you that if this government was serious about dealing with poverty in this province, they would have had a plan when they were first elected in 2003. It is today 2009, and every time issues are raised in this House about the dire straits of people, whether it's people in poverty, whether it's children who are not being served with regard to mental health services, children with autism—against whom the Premier broke his promise—every time that we raise an issue in this House, this government has nothing to say other than to blame the previous government of 15 years ago. Given the opportunity, they would blame Sir John A. Macdonald. This government refuses to take responsibility for the actions that they have failed to take since their election in 2003.

I want to talk about the substance of the bill as this government suggests it is. The first thing that the minister is required to do under this act is to commence at the end of 2009—I don't know why that is. What is the date today? It's March 24, 2009, and the government brings in a bill today that we're debating, but the minister is required to do nothing until the end of 2009. What is the minister going to do between now and the end of the year? Oh, I know: probably have a few press conferences. Let's travel the province and let people know. Do some more dog-and-pony shows. Let's have a few consultations. Let's show and let's talk, but let's not do.

So the minister is required under this act, commencing at the end of 2009, to do what? "To prepare, and subsequently publish on a government website"—now there's action. Beginning at the end of 2009, the minister will then begin to publish something on the government website. We anticipate what that will look like, having had months to prepare for that website. We can't imagine what wealth of information might be contained on that government website at that time.

The second action word here—listen up: "The minister is required to regularly consult with ... key stakeholders." Well, what has she been doing since 2003? What has the government been doing since 2003, if not consulting? And by the way, why would you not consult before you bring in legislation? First, you bring in

legislation, then you have to consult. But I know why: The reason that the minister has to consult after tabling the legislation is because there's nothing in the legislation. There is nothing here. What the minister now has before her is a piece of legislation that will have been debated in this House, at second reading, committee and third reading—and then she'll go out and consult.

What will she be told? Well, she won't start until the end of 2009, and by that time, I suggest the \$18-billion deficit will have ballooned into a \$25-billion deficit, and there will be more people in poverty than ever before. What she'll be asked by people at that time, who will be rising up against her and her government, is: "Why didn't you act in 2003? Why didn't you act before now to do something about an issue that you knew full well was growing under your watch?"

The next action word in this bill is "review." Let's see what will be reviewed. "At least every five years," according to the legislation, "the government of Ontario must review the long-term ... strategy"—every five years. Let's see. That would be after every election. I don't want to in any way be presumptive here, but I have a feeling that this minister will never have an opportunity to review her long-term strategy. I'm convinced that as a result of the non-action not only on the issue of poverty, but on the issues of economic development which would in fact resolve many of the poverty issues, this minister will no longer have an opportunity to review anything as a minister because the people of this province will have said, "Enough is enough." What they will want is to have some leadership, not only on the issue of poverty, but on the issue of economic development and stability, so that people in this province will once again have hope.

0930

We know, on this side of the House, that the best answer to poverty is to ensure that those who have the ability to work are given the opportunity to work; that those who have the ability to learn are given the opportunity to learn; that it's not just about having press conferences and making announcements, but it's about putting in place a solid plan that is going to give young people some hope by giving them the right kind of information; that it's not just simply placating immigrants to this country with promises, but giving them specific programs so that they can take their talents and expertise and knowledge and become involved in a meaningful and positive way in their communities. None of that has been provided by this government and over the last number of years they got away with it. Why? Because they were riding the wave of the previous government's work in this province to establish economic stability. They had the privilege of riding the wave of previous work that had been done to create jobs, to create economic activity. That momentum has come to a grinding halt, after a number of years of this government's inaction and lack of a plan.

The fourth action word in this bill is "inform." Now, there's a challenge. Here's what the bill requires the minister to do: "The minister is required to inform the public

of the review...." That's a huge job. Get those communications consultants out. Roll out those—

Hon. Jim Watson: Is that Paul Rhodes?

Mr. Frank Klees: Yeah. Roll out those experts, the spin doctors.

I have to say, the one thing that this government does well is spin. There is no other government that I have ever observed, whether at the federal or provincial level, that has been better at spinning information than the McGuinty government. They do it so well that they have stakeholders believing them, they have the public believing them. Sometimes even they believe it.

But you see, here's the problem: Spin eventually spins out. The reason that this is all coming to a grinding halt is because the momentum is gone. There's no more energy left. They've consumed it all. Now, out of the depths of an \$18-billion deficit, they will try to resurrect. It just won't happen. And do you know why? Because in order to generate recovery, you have to have a plan, and that plan has to be based on principles. This government not only does not have a plan; there is a dearth of principles. It doesn't matter whether it's health care, the economy, social issues; there is no relevance to what is going on in this province today.

I have yet to see a piece of legislation come forward from this government that is not 90% spin and public relations and 10% substance. That's why we face the crisis that we're facing in this province today.

The final action word in this legislation is "solicit." As a result of each review, the minister is required to solicit the views of the public and carry out—what?—further consultations. So you see, we're going around in circles here, and the spin is going to have the minister dizzy, because she starts out with a review, she goes through consultations, she then does her report, she then posts it all on the website, and then that leads to what? It leads to a further review. Honestly, I find it difficult to understand how members of this government can in good conscience stand in their place and defend what we have before us.

I want to take the next few minutes to do what the government has not done, and that is to share with this House and those who are observing this debate what we believe should be done and what we believe a real plan of action should contain to address the poverty issue.

In the explanatory note, this government talks about the fact that they should be addressing issues of poverty reduction to fulfill the objectives of social, economic and cultural development. You see how upside down this government has it? Because it is in fact economic development that will resolve the poverty issue, not a poverty strategy to contribute to economic development. It's the other way around. The best plan for poverty reduction, I submit, is a good, strong economic development plan that will allow people who are wallowing in poverty today to take themselves out of that circumstance with the help of a plan that will allow them, either through retraining or through education, to become productive in our society. Although it's important, obviously, that people at the lower end of the pay scale

have a respectful pay for the work that they do, the debate needs to be about creating good jobs and creating an environment in this province that is going to encourage employers to create those jobs.

What this government has done consistently since their election is create an environment that is making it more and more impossible for businesses to exist in this province. Look at the number of times that I've brought to the attention of the Minister of Labour in this House that he has an army of inspectors roaming this province who are making it virtually impossible for employers to keep their doors open because of red tape and unnecessary intimidation on the part of individuals who should be civil servants. They should be working with businesses, helping them comply, not threatening them. But the minister refuses to understand. I'm asking him as minister to simply take the time to recognize what's going on on the front lines and to instruct his army of civil servants to have a change of attitude, to have a change of mind, to work with businesses and help create an environment that will actually encourage people to invest in this province and to create additional jobs. But that's not what they've been doing. Instead of doing that, they've been layering more red tape and more regulations onto the very people who are the solution for poverty in this province.

What else have they done? I can tell you what we would do: We would eliminate those barriers of red tape and regulatory burden, and we would form partnerships with businesses to say, "What is it that government can do to help you as a business create opportunities in our communities?" Entry-level jobs, jobs into which people can grow, advanced technology jobs, whatever they might be—that's the solution.

0940

There is another aspect that I want to speak to and leave on the record for this government. We have been appealing to this government for the last number of years to ensure that funding for mental health is a priority. The number of times I have submissions in my constituency office from social workers in our community, pleading with me to help lobby this government to ensure that mental health services are properly funded, because of the number of people who become disengaged from activity within our communities because of mental health challenges that are not being treated, and as a result they end up on disability as opposed to being able to earn their own way—we can't continue to ignore the mental health challenges in our communities. They are a challenge from the very young through to the adult ages. We cannot continue to ignore that issue and pretend that we care about our communities and pretend that we care about poverty. Those are practical steps, amongst many others, that this government knows about, that we've called on them to address, and they continue to turn their backs on the most vulnerable. Their answer is hollow rhetoric such as we have in Bill 152. Surely this government can do better.

They will be held accountable, not by us, because they don't listen to the official opposition here, but by the

people they serve. I know that many of the backbenchers in this government feel the same way that we do. I ask them to take some action as members of this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I find myself in the odd situation of having to try to discount some of what has been said by the Conservative member. I agree with the Conservatives that the Liberals are doing a lot of press announcements, that they're trying to look good on the poverty issue, that they're really not attacking the core issues. I agree. But to be lectured by a Conservative having to do with the avails of what should be done when it comes to poverty is pretty hard to take. I was in this Legislature when Mike Harris and Mr. Eves were Premiers of this province, and there was more done to attack the poor in the time that they were in government than any other time since I've been here. So I take it a little bit as passing strange. I remember a reduction of 24% that people on welfare were given as a result of the 1995 election. So I find it a little bit hard to take that all of a sudden the Conservatives profess themselves to be the saviours of the poor, because clearly what's going on is that this party is taking another shift to the right. That is the decision they'll make, and we'll see where that gets us in the next election. On the issue that he talks about, should the government be doing more, I think the answer is definitely yes.

Ce qui est bien clair pour moi, c'est que ce gouvernement a toujours voulu dire d'une belle manière au monde : « Ah oui, regardez ce qu'on fait. C'est donc excellent. On a cette initiative-là, on a une autre initiative là-bas, et on va faire de belles affaires. » Mais comment le monde va être affecté dans leur communauté, chez eux, ça, c'est une toute autre affaire. Donc, on va avoir une chance pendant ce débat de parler de la vision qu'on pense qu'on doit prendre comme gouvernement pour être capable d'avancer ce dossier pour vraiment avoir un impact. Mais ce qui est clair, et je suis d'accord avec le député, c'est que ce gouvernement veut parler une belle parole quand ça vient à la pauvreté, mais quant à l'action, il n'y en a pas.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm pleased to participate and support this particular piece of legislation for a couple of reasons. This legislation will keep the government's feet to the fire as a result of a requirement that we come back to this Legislative Assembly and report on progress that's being made in our fight against poverty.

I was very pleased to be part of the cabinet committee on poverty reduction, chaired so ably by my colleague the Minister of Children and Youth Services. It was a first for the province of Ontario: to have a cabinet committee dedicated to coming forward with an action plan to reduce poverty, to bring in specific targets.

Some of the initiatives, obviously, that I'm pleased with include the Ontario child benefit, which is in place and in effect, and children are benefiting from that; and

social housing, affordable housing, which is part of my portfolio. I'm pleased that we were able to sign an agreement with the previous federal government for an affordable housing program that is seeing literally tens of thousands of individuals in Ontario get a break in terms of the cost of housing, which is, in many instances, their single largest cost when it comes to their household budget. I'm also pleased that the current federal government has agreed with us that they need to be back in the affordable housing business.

Last week, I was at 20 Rochester, in the riding of Ottawa Centre, with my colleague Yasir Naqvi and other members of the Legislature, including Phil McNeely, and I was asked a question about the minimum wage: "Are you going too fast?" And I said, "The Liberal approach is a balanced approach." There's one party that wants us to raise the minimum wage overnight and another party that doesn't want us to increase the minimum wage at all. We've taken a balanced, thoughtful approach where we're bringing in incremental increases to the minimum wage—again, in our fight against poverty, to help some of the most vulnerable in our community.

I look forward to this debate continuing, and I'd ask members to support this very progressive piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: The very first thing that comes to mind is that the member from Newmarket–Aurora, in his time here, has always shown great compassion for people who have lost hope and opportunity. I guess what's happened is, he's trying to make sure that we address the first, primary issue, and that is creating opportunities for people to take advantage of.

I recall the first remark I heard, I believe from Premier McGuinty, during the first signs of the economy tipping. He said—I think it was in reference to some of my constituents, the auto sector—there's a slight contraction. Well, it was anything but; it was more like a coronary attack rather than a slight contraction.

We see the trouble now, and what has the reaction been? Well, it's been in typical Liberal fashion, quite honestly: tax and spend. They've raised the health tax, and now almost every hospital is in deficit. We know that the whole long-term-care system was promised more money: \$6,000 more for the care of persons in long-term care. How much is there? There's less. In fact, they haven't built any new facilities for long-term care—to take care of the hospitals.

So I'm very concerned for those vulnerable people, as we march towards a deepening recession with a government that has no plan except to spend more money—which is future taxes—and now we're talking about a strategy to address poverty.

The member for Newmarket–Aurora concentrated on five key actions that the minister would take. I think he had it right when he said the timing of it is almost strategically mapped out to avoid the problem. Imagine not consulting extensively with all of the people who wanted to participate in the public process leading up to Bill 154.

This is nothing more than more chatter with no solutions. I am so disappointed in the minister's actions this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you for giving me a chance to comment on the speaker from Newmarket–Aurora. I listened to him for 20 minutes, speaking about his record when he was in government, and he was taking pride in cutting the welfare rolls by 24% and making more poor. He was also taking pride in deregulating most industries in the province of Ontario, many different regulators in this province. And what happened? We had the Walkerton tragedy. He was taking pride in cutting taxes for the wealthy. What happened? It affected the most vulnerable people among us, affected our health care, our education—and all this just to make the wealthy wealthier.

Our approach to deal with poverty is a great approach. As you heard from many different speakers who spoke before us in this place, who talked about our plan, our strategy, to support the poor and support the vulnerable people among us, to create affordable homes across the province of Ontario, to house the people who cannot afford to have a regular home—all of these strategies are taking place in the province of Ontario. I know the dilemmas are huge, the disaster—we are facing a challenging time—but you know, due to the leadership of the Minister of Children and Youth Services in this province and the chair of the cabinet committee to reduce poverty in this province, we are going to see the light at the end of the tunnel, because we are on the right track, going in the right direction.

0950

I want to applaud our government, and I'll applaud the minister and all of our government for the job they do on a daily basis on behalf of all of us in this great province of Ontario to address this very issue, because it's important to all of us. We cannot prosper in this province when we walk alone. We have to bring all of us, all of the people from every economic level, to walk together. It's the only way we will have a prosperous future.

Thank you for allowing me to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I will return now to the member for Newmarket–Aurora, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to thank my colleagues who commented on my remarks: the members from London–Fanshawe, Durham, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the member from Timmins–James Bay.

In response to the member from Timmins–James Bay, who said that he found it hard to take that I would speak in support of supporting the most vulnerable in our community, I want to say with all due respect that he does not have a corner on compassion. In all of my life, it has been a core value of mine that we have a collective responsibility to support those in our communities who cannot support or help themselves because of circumstances in their life. That core value informed me in my life prior to coming to this place, and it continues to

inform my opinions and my view to social justice as a member of this Legislature. It's in the context of what I personally believe that I entered in this debate today. And it's with this that I appeal to this government to move beyond the empty rhetoric of the bill before us and to put in place a substantive plan that will, in fact, address the poverty issues, not simply by way of a pronouncement, but by way of real action.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being reasonably close to 10 a.m., this House stands in recess until 10 a.m.

The House recessed from 0953 to 1000.

LEGISLATIVE MACE MASSE PARLEMENTAIRE

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It being 10 a.m., I do now adjourn the House during pleasure.

Members, pray be seated.

Please open the doors so we can invite our special guests to enter the chamber and be seated.

Honourable members, it is my pleasure this morning to introduce to you representatives of those organizations which have contributed to the successful completion of the Mine to Mace project.

Before I do so, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, Michael Gravelle, whose ministry acted, first, as a liaison between De Beers and the Legislative Assembly, then as the coordinator for all those who contributed goods or services to the project.

Please allow me in particular to recognize the efforts of Rob Merwin, executive director, diamond sector unit at the ministry, whose enthusiasm for and logistical organization of this project contributed mightily to its completion.

The story begins approximately 1,150 kilometres north of here, in the James Bay lowlands. The area is home to the Attawapiskat First Nation, and that community has been an integral part of the success of De Beers Canada's Victor mine. Today, the community is proudly represented here by Chief Theresa Hall of the Attawapiskat First Nation.

Chief Hall is accompanied by Nicole Edwards. Nicole is a graduate of the De Beers process plant trainee program. Members will be interested to know that Nicole is also the aunt of one of our former pages, Jordan Edwards. Welcome to both of you, and thank you for helping us mark this historic occasion.

The origin of the Mine to Mace project lies with De Beers Canada, which has generously gifted the people of Ontario with three diamonds from the first commercial production of the Victor mine. This gift will commemorate in a lasting way the historic discovery of Ontario's

diamonds and the industry that produces them. Joining us today is Mr. Jim Gowans, president of De Beers Canada.

The stones chosen for this unusual project were expertly hand-picked by Ontario's chief gemologist, Ron Gashinski. Mr. Gashinski can attest to the purity of the diamonds extracted from the Victor mine, and he made certain that the quality of these particular stones would equal their intended setting.

Many of you took the opportunity to view the cutting and polishing of one of the diamonds right here at Queen's Park a couple of weeks ago. This was made possible by Crossworks Manufacturing, who were good enough to provide the cutting and polishing tools and the services of an expert diamond cutter, Jack Lu. We are pleased to have Uri Ariel, president of Crossworks Manufacturing, with us this morning.

Every diamond needs a setting, and every setting should be platinum. The Sudbury platinum used for the mace setting was graciously donated by Vale Inco. Jennifer Sloan, executive vice-president of corporate affairs, represents Vale Inco here this morning.

Casting the setting which would fix the diamonds to the mace proved to be possibly one of the greater challenges of this project. However, its success is a tribute to the skill and tenacity of the Corona Jewellery Company, represented here by its president, John Minister. Corona also arranged to have the mace cleaned and replated in preparation for the diamond setting.

Finally, Reena Ahluwalia is a Toronto-based jewellery designer who is world renowned. It was Reena who created the setting design for the diamonds in the mace. The design incorporates two diamonds, one rough and one polished. Its designer has described the setting as a spiralling form that gently secures the rough stone signifying the mine. The spiral itself leads up to the polished diamond, symbolizing the promise of prosperity. The design is intended to convey the concept of "communities coming together to elevate the emerging status of the diamond industry in Ontario."

Members will be interested to know that this project has been particularly special to Reena, since it converges with a remnant of her childhood. Reena's grandfather, T. H. Tembhre, was the Speaker of the House in the province of Madhya Pradesh in India. Reena told me she can recall her grandfather wearing his robes and regaling her with stories of Parliament, memories that have made her recent visits here to the assembly warmly familiar. Reena, thanks.

To all of you, and to those in the gallery who have also been involved in this project, I am pleased, on behalf of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, to express sincere appreciation for your efforts towards making this once nebulous idea come to fruition. Thank you all very much.

Originally a medieval weapon, and once the symbol of the supremacy of the crown, the mace was first used for ceremonial purposes in 13th-century England and France. In modern times, it symbolizes the authority of the Speaker and signifies the independence of Parliament. It

also serves as a potent reminder of our parliamentary heritage and tradition.

Ontario's current mace was crafted by Charles Zollikofer in 1867. It is made of gilded copper and is the third mace used in the province's history. The original mace, taken out of retirement and pressed into service this past January, dates back to 1792, and will once again be placed on display in the lobby.

Today, this assembly is presented with a mace transformed. The placement of the diamonds in Ontario's mace represents the uniqueness of our northern community and the wealth of our mineral resources, merged with one of the most powerful symbols of this province's parliamentary democracy. The parliamentary symbolism is in turn represented on the girdle of the polished diamond, which is inscribed with the motto of the Legislative Assembly, "Audi alteram partem"—hear the other side.

Now I would like to recognize the Premier.

1010

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, on behalf of the government, I would like to thank everyone who was involved in this wonderful project, the restoration of Ontario's mace. Not only has it been repaired, it has also been renewed, with the addition, as you mentioned, of two diamonds.

Je dis souvent que nous sommes au mieux lorsque nous travaillons ensemble. Par conséquent, il convenait que pour ce projet, un tel nombre de personnes se réunissent pour ajouter un nouveau chapitre à la riche histoire et aux traditions de l'Ontario.

I often say that we work best when we work together, so it is fitting that for this project so many people came together to add to the rich tapestry of Ontario's history and traditions.

As you mentioned, Speaker, the diamonds used in this project were generously provided by De Beers Canada from their Victor mine near Attawapiskat. I can mention in passing that I had the good fortune to visit the Victor mine and the community of Attawapiskat, and it is a great pleasure to welcome Chief Theresa Hall from the Attawapiskat First Nation to our Legislature today. Ontario's chief gemologist, Ron Gashinski, hand-picked the stones. The platinum used in the setting was mined in Ontario and provided by Vale Inco Ltd. The setting was crafted by Corona Jewellery Canada. The diamond cutting tools and master cutter Jack Lu were supplied by Crossworks Manufacturing. They tell me that Jack and those tools have been hard at work for more than 30 hours here in the Legislature to shape one of the diamonds. Finally, I want to thank Reena Ahluwalia for designing such a symbolic setting.

I might add one further thanks. Speaker, I am convinced that if it were not for you and your usual good humour and enthusiasm, this is not a project that would have achieved the success that it has. So, on behalf of everyone here, I thank you as well.

Le diamant brut est un exemple de la richesse naturelle de l'Ontario et sa forme polie nous rappelle ce que notre magnifique province est capable d'accomplir.

The rough diamond signifies Ontario's natural riches and leads to the polished stone reminding us what our great province is capable of. The mace is a symbol of our heritage and parliamentary democracy. It represents the authority of the Speaker and the supremacy of our laws. Its history in the provincial assembly is both long and distinguished, and now with two of Ontario's first-ever mined diamonds added, it represents much more than that. It shows the wealth of our resources, the strength of our manufacturers, the talent of our artisans and, above all, the spirit of our people: their commitment to democracy, the value they place in our shared heritage, and their unrelenting drive for progress.

Au nom du gouvernement, je remercie toutes les personnes qui ont permis à cet événement de se produire, et je suis heureux de m'associer à mes collègues pour souligner le retour de la masse à l'Assemblée législative.

Again, on behalf of the government, I thank everyone who made today possible. I am pleased to join my colleagues in welcoming the return of our mace and all that it represents.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. The Leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: There may be a little repetition in terms of my comments with respect to your contributions, Speaker, and the Premier's, but I think this is one of those memorable occasions when repetition is appropriate.

It's an honour to rise on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus to comment on the return of the mace, now fitted with two diamonds courtesy of De Beers. The diamonds, as we've heard, come from the first commercial production of the Victor diamond mine near Attawapiskat in northern Ontario.

For those watching and wondering why this is a significant event, I thought I'd take just a few moments to explain and perhaps elaborate beyond what the Speaker did, in terms of the special place that the mace occupies in parliamentary history, dating as far back as the first meetings of Parliament in England in the 13th century.

Our lineage of maces in this province has a colourful and interesting history. The first mace of Ontario was used in the chamber of Upper Canada's first Parliament in 1792 at Newark, which is now Niagara-on-the-Lake. It was crafted, we're told, from wood, either pine or fir. When the Parliament of Upper Canada moved to York, now Toronto, so did the mace, only to be stolen during the War of 1812 by the United States Navy. It was returned in 1934 under special goodwill orders of President Franklin Roosevelt and the United States Congress. This mace was used as our backup while the mace being celebrated today was being transformed. I'm told it's going to be retired once again to public display in the main lobby of the building.

In 1845, a new mace was purchased for \$500. This mace resembled the mace used in the British House of Commons. It was silver and gilded, and adorned with gems and pearls. Unfortunately, this mace met the fate of

mace number one. It too was stolen, this time in 1849 by an unruly mob in Montreal. The mace was rescued and returned to the Speaker the very next day, but it was destined for worse. In 1854, the mace was twice rescued from fires at the Parliament buildings in Quebec. That mace was used by the Union Parliament in Toronto and Quebec until Confederation. It eventually ended up in the House of Commons in Ottawa, but didn't survive the fire of February 3, 1916, and was reduced to a tiny ball of silver and gold.

Now the present: Our current gilded copper mace was created in 1867 by Charles Zollikofer of Ottawa. At the time it cost \$200. I'm sure its value has gone up considerably since it left the table.

I can't help but mention here that I'm sure we can all agree in this chamber that we don't want history to repeat itself. We need to keep a watchful eye on our third and recently bejewelled mace. One of our staff members already tried, I'm told unsuccessfully, to get the diamond cutter to cut two pieces of glass from old Coke bottles for the mace instead of the diamonds.

As the Speaker mentioned, the mace has evolved from a weapon in medieval times to a symbol of the Speaker's authority in current times. Just as the hockey game can't start until the puck is dropped at centre ice, the House can't begin until the mace takes centre stage on the Clerk's table in front of the Speaker. With its distinct history and lineage, the mace has also come to represent our rich parliamentary heritage, of which we in this province are extremely proud.

To know where you're going is to understand where you've been. The mace also symbolizes our belief in parliamentary democracy, both literally and figuratively. The girdle of the stones on the mace bears the inscription of our motto at the Legislative Assembly, "*Audi alteram partem*"—my old the Latin teacher would be proud of me—which means, "Hear the other side."

Interjections.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I didn't say a word. We cannot debate freely yet civilly in this chamber unless the mace is in its rightful place on the table, a sign that the House is in session.

I'd be remiss in ending my remarks without thanking, on behalf of the entire Progressive Conservative caucus, all of those involved in the Mine to Mace project: the workers of the Victor diamond mine who extracted the diamonds from deep within the ground of northern Ontario; Ontario's chief gemologist, Ron Gashinsky; De Beers, of course, for their generous gift of the two diamonds, and a third diamond that is going to be on display at a later date in an exhibit about the mace; of course, Chief Hall and the people of the Attawapiskat First Nation for their successful partnership with De Beers in the Victor mine project; Crossworks Manufacturing for supplying an expert diamond cutter; Corona Jewellery for incorporating the setting on the mace; and Vale Inco Ltd. for supplying the Sudbury platinum. I'd also like to thank the designer, Reena Ahluwalia. As the Speaker mentioned, Reena's grandfather was a Speaker in India, so

this project undoubtedly holds a special place in her heart.

In closing, I hope that our improved mace will inspire us all in this chamber to offer valuable debate that is pure and true, just like the diamonds that it now holds.

1020

Ms. Andrea Horwath: On the historic occasion of the reintroduction of Ontario's mace, I'm honoured to rise in this House and to speak to one of the great symbols of our provincial Legislature and to the gift bestowed upon the people of Ontario today, for, as everyone in this House knows, there has been a great deal of work and a great amount of collaboration to bring our mace, in its renewed form, back here to its rightful place in this House.

The mace is an extraordinary symbol of democracy. It speaks to the value Ontarians place on the democratic processes that occur within the walls of this very building and to the highest hopes and standards that each one of us brings to our work in the Legislature each and every day. This mace tells the story of the hard-working women and men of Ontario, some of whom helped to reinvigorate our mace, and the many, many more who should be a constant reminder to us elected members of the people we are meant to serve here.

On this occasion, we do owe a debt of gratitude. The transformation of our mace is a generous gift from a number of individuals and organizations. De Beers Canada donated three diamonds, two of which are now set in the mace. These exceptionally valuable diamonds, selected by Ontario's chief gemologist, Ron Gashinski, are from the first commercial production of the Victor mine near Attawapiskat First Nation and the James Bay lowlands. They are some of the finest diamonds in the world and De Beers's \$1-billion project is a reality because the company decided that it would not move forward without the buy-in of our First Nations.

The process was a unique one. In the absence of public policy, the De Beers organization took considerable time to engage First Nations in the process of developing this mine. It wasn't an easy process for First Nations and it wasn't an easy process for the company. First Nations leaders worked very hard over a number of years to determine how best to ensure that the interests of their people and communities would be served. Together with the company, all of the James Bay First Nations negotiated impact benefit agreements, which provide for jobs, economic opportunities and other benefits.

With us here today, of course, is First Nations leader Theresa Hall, Chief of the Attawapiskat First Nation. I've had the opportunity as well to see the mine first-hand before it was in full production—it was still under construction—and to visit Attawapiskat and other First Nations communities along the James Bay coast, communities like Peawanuck and Fort Albany.

But there are others that we should salute also for this magnificent mace: Reena Ahluwalia, an internationally renowned and locally based jewellery artist who designed the setting and worked with Toronto's Corona Jewellery Company; Vale Inco Ltd. of Sudbury, which donated the

platinum used in its setting; expert diamond cutter Jack Lu from Crossworks Manufacturing, a Canadian diamond-cutting firm, who donated the more than 30 hours of work it took to cut these fine diamonds—and I have to say it was an excellent brainstorm, whoever thought of it, to have that happening right in our building. It was an amazing opportunity for people who visited the Legislature to see the work that was being done by Mr. Lu as he cut those diamonds to be put into the mace.

On behalf of New Democrats, I want to thank you all, all of these individuals and companies, for your generous donations to the people of Ontario. But I want to talk very briefly about the mace as well. Its symbolism is great. We've already heard that in medieval times it was used as a weapon, but today the mace represents the Speaker of the House's authority and role in overseeing proceedings of this Legislature. The mace symbolizes the transfer of power from the crown to the people, as represented by their members of provincial Parliament. The mace should stand as a reminder of the work that elected members have signed up for to serve the interests and the needs of all Ontarians. It should stand as a reminder of the democratic principles that lay at the very foundation of our Legislature.

Here, today, as we lay eyes for the first time on our renewed mace in its proper place, we should also be wise to take a moment to pause and think about its significance. It represents the hard work and collaboration of people from across our great province. It should also remind the members of this House of the hard work ahead of us and the demands placed on us to stand up for all Ontarians who look to us for leadership during these specifically and especially difficult economic times.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1025 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I am pleased to recognize guests of page Michael Niven, who is the page captain today. He is from Providence Bay on Manitoulin Island, an area that you know very well, Mr. Speaker, and are also familiar with his parents' restaurant.

In the members' gallery east, we have his mother and father, Greg and Heather Niven, and his sister Maddy. We have Craig Cress and Donnie Schramm, Dr. John Brebner and Ardith Brebner, Barry Snitzinger—did I get that right?—and Bev Ritz. Welcome.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's my pleasure to introduce the members of the Save Our Structures steering committee, who have worked long and hard for those in social housing—Susan Gapka, Wally Simpson, Karlene Steer, Kathrine Wallace and Lyn McCormick—with no small success.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just want to recognize the guests who were in the Speaker's gallery earlier for the Mine to Mace project presentation.

From De Beers were Derek Teevan, Ashley Brown, Peter Mah, Rachel Pineault, Tom Ormsby, Daphne Wace, Simon O'Brien, Ingrid Hann, Kathleen Gowans and Annie Stavridis.

From Vale Inco, Cory McPhee and Brad Ryder; from Corona Jewellery, Michael Minister; from Crossworks Manufacturing, Dylan Dix; Kamal Ahluwalia; the family of Ron Gashinski, his son Michael, daughter Laurie, his son-in-law John Pringle and his grandson Matthew Crosgrave; and from the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, Christine Kaszycki and Rob Merwin.

There being no further introductions, it's now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The question is for the Premier. Premier, this weekend's National Post reports that auto sales in Canada will fall 10% this year from 2008; that's representing 200,000 units lost. On March 12, my colleague the member from Halton asked your deputy to consider a provision in the upcoming budget for a three-month PST holiday on new car sales. That's a win-win measure, in our view, for everyone. It gives overtaxed consumers a break, and it will stimulate car sales, which is good news for car dealers and carmakers. Premier, can you confirm that a PST holiday on new car sales will be part of Thursday's budget?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question. I know that my honourable colleague knows I can't confirm what's going to be in the budget on Thursday, particularly insofar as tax measures are concerned. I know that my honourable colleague understands that.

We have received quite a bit of advice, including this particular measure, that would have some benefit to the auto sector. I can tell you that the Minister of Finance has the responsibility to take into consideration all the varied advice we have received. I certainly sense that there is a strong consensus in this House that we need to find more ways to lend further strength to our auto sector, and that's going to be in part what the budget is going to speak to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The Premier has a puzzling standard in terms of releasing budget information, as we saw his colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs making an announcement last week.

Premier, a PST holiday on new car and truck sales has a proven track record. It was introduced in 1980 by a Progressive Conservative government. When that happened, car sales jumped 17%. The member from Haldimand-Norfolk proposed the PST holiday in a letter to your Minister of Finance last January. He never got a response. Premier, why won't you confirm that there will be a PST holiday in Thursday's budget? Or are you simply not prepared to give the PC Party any credit for a budget proposal?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague mentioned that there was a lack of response. Just so we're clear in terms of the approach that we try to bring, we offered, and it was gracefully accepted by the Conservatives, a technical briefing by the Deputy Minister of Finance as to the state of the economy. That was accepted—I think it was Mr. Hudak who accepted that—and also a meeting with the Minister of Finance, so we could hear directly with respect to their views for the budget. So there was an openness on our part to hear them out in that regard.

I can only say once again to the leader of the official opposition that we've received a number of pieces of advice as to how we might improve the strength of the auto sector in the province of Ontario. We've got to find a way in our budget to reconcile some of the advice. Some is conflicting, I might say, but we certainly remain very much committed to strengthening the sector here in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: We hear this kind of rhetoric on regular occasions from the Premier and some of his colleagues, that they're prepared to consider opposition ideas on the economy, but then they simply dismiss them out of hand at the end of the day. If the Premier had done a little more listening over the last five years, Ontario's economy wouldn't be in the mess it's in today.

Our proposal will also have an immediate positive impact that's not dependent on the broader discussions on the auto industry's future in Ontario. Premier, why won't you commit to this hand up to the auto industry, an initiative that I believe has the support of taxpayers, car dealers and carmakers?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not sure I can add much more of value to what I've already said. This is one idea among many that speak to the challenges faced by our auto sector. We are working with all parts of the sector, whether it's suppliers, labour, management, folks involved in financing the sector, to see what we can do to strengthen the sector.

We have a table in Ottawa, involving all of the players as well, to see where we can go working together with the federal government. But I do share fully the sentiment which is embodied in the proposal put forward by the Conservatives, which is that we need to find a way together to further strengthen the sector. We remain very much committed to doing that.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Back to the Premier, and again it's about fuelling Ontario's economic engine. Last Thursday, members of the PC caucus put forward another proposal to help the auto industry. In partnership with the federal budget's proposed Retire Your Ride program, we're proposing a \$2,000 credit to Ontarians toward the purchase or lease of a new car after turning in their vehicles of 10 years or older. So again, Premier, you've selectively leaked a number of initiatives out of this year's

budget. Will you confirm today that a Retire Your Ride credit will be included in Thursday's budget?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I can't speak to a specific tax measure in the budget. I know that my honourable colleague understands that. What I can say, and I know that my colleague would not want to lose sight of this, is that there are costs associated with each and every one of these measures. If there were to be a full uptake of this particular proposal, it would cost the treasury \$4 billion. I'm not saying that it would go that far, but if there were only a 10% uptake, I think the cost is \$400 million. So there are costs associated with each of these. There are competing demands, whether we need to do more for health care, for education, for environmental protection, for forestry, for mining, for the auto sector, and the Minister of Finance's privilege is to find a way to reconcile all of these competing interests and come up with a budget that speaks to the values of Ontarians.

1040

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I suspect the Premier is painting a worst-case scenario in terms of revenue loss. We're going to have revenue investments and revenue returns with respect to this kind of a program. There are partnerships with the federal government that could be worked out. There is job creation which is going to generate tax revenue as well. This is an initiative, a suggestion, a proposal, that I think merits serious attention. The idea has global appeal. Germany has been very successful with a scrappage fee. Italy's proposal along these lines is, as we understand it, working well with respect to hybrid vehicles. France and Spain have also introduced similar programs, with great success. Premier, will you include our retire-your-ride proposal in the budget and provide that much-needed stimulus to the auto industry and Ontario's economy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I don't think a Minister of Finance has ever been more thorough than has this one of late in preparation for this budget. I think that's perfectly appropriate, in keeping with the extent of the challenge before us. He has received all kinds of suggestions and ideas and proposals and recommendations and pieces of advice on so many fronts. We cannot possibly do everything. But as I've said many times in the past, we will do everything that we can to both strengthen the economy and provide support for our families as they seek to weather this economic storm. That is kind of the gist of where the budget is going to go: to help Ontarians weather the storm and strengthen the economy at the same time.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: One of my colleagues reminded me that the Premier, when he's talking about the auto sector, has frequently talked about the triggering of so many benefits in the economy when a car is sold. I want to suggest to him that this program has, I think, and our party believes, widespread support and can have an enormous benefit to the economy in Ontario. It has support, certainly, from the automobile dealers' association. They believe that this scrappage program that we've proposed will benefit the environment, make our roads

safer and stimulate new sales of autos. If you take one 1987-model-year automobile off the road, it will reduce smog emissions by an equivalent of 37 2007-model-year automobiles.

Premier, there are over two million pre-1997-model cars currently on the roads. Again I ask you, will you support our proposed scrappage fee program?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think the honourable member is aware of my answer now on this score. Let me just take the opportunity to talk a little bit more about why it is that we need to strengthen the economy. This could be one measure that might be incorporated into that. We need to strengthen the economy because, while we don't know when this worldwide recession will come to an end, we know one thing for certain: It will end. And when it does end, we want Ontario to be ready to seize the new possibilities to be found in that post-recession world. That's why, just as we are committed to finding ways to help Ontarians weather the storm, we are also equally committed to building a brighter future by investing in our economy today. This is one of many measures which we are considering as we seek to strengthen the economy.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: These are tough times for Ontario families. Since October, we've lost some 160,000 jobs in the province—an average of over 30,000 jobs a month. That's a lot of families feeling a lot of pain. While Ontarians are looking for a government that is going to protect their jobs, the Premier is talking about sales tax harmonization, a move that would drive up the cost of basic necessities for families. Why, in this time of crisis, is the Premier looking to nickel-and-dime Ontario families?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question. I think my honourable colleague knows that we have received advice, and I think there seems to be a fairly broad consensus among businesses—not all are supportive of this measure, but there seems to be a fairly strong consensus among businesses—that we ought to adopt a single sales tax here in Ontario. That's the strong recommendation of many economists as well.

As I've said in the past, it's not the kind of thing that we can possibly entertain unless we have significant support from the federal government and unless we can put in place measures to protect families. Just so we're clear with respect to that particular approach, if there was a way for us to pull that all together, that might be something that we'd want to consider. But again, I just want to make it absolutely clear: While we're receiving strong requests from the business community in this regard, we can't do this without support from the federal government, and we would never do this unless there was a way that we could also protect our families.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, the Premier has been quite clear about his thoughts around this issue, but what

we need to be clear is that the Premier is not going to be implementing this, and he needs to tell families that very clearly. Instead of focusing on jobs, however, he's talking about it. We're hearing comments constantly that this is something that is on his agenda and on his mind. Instead of slapping an 8% tax on basic goods, which means things like \$1.76 more for diapers, \$1.04 more for girls' shoes, 72 cents for children's vitamins—these are all the kinds of things that people buy every single week, the kinds of things that go in the grocery cart every time people go grocery shopping. Especially in times of difficulty, families do not need this extra tax.

So I need the Premier to very clearly state right now, to tell Ontario families, that he is definitely not going to move ahead with the plan to raise sales taxes in this province.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not sure I could be any more clear with respect to our resolve on a couple of fronts. It's not the kind of thing that we could undertake without significant support from the federal government. It's not the kind of thing that we would undertake unless we can put in place measures that would protect Ontario families.

But I say to my honourable colleague, I'm just wondering if the party's position has now changed, because it had recommended—I have a letter from November 2007, under then-leader Mr. Hampton, recommending that we increase the PST to fill in the space that had formerly been occupied by the GST. Now, that would have resulted in an increase in sales taxes for Ontarians. I'm just wondering if that remains their position, because it seems to conflict with the position that this particular leader is taking today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I know the Premier knows how to do math, and that would have been a zero-sum game, but nonetheless. We also know, and the Premier talked about it in the scrums this morning, that the very high-level talks that he claims need to happen with the federal government are, in fact, already under way. That's something that he admitted to just this very morning.

The family of the auto parts worker in Etobicoke is wondering how she's going to be able to replace her lost income; the Premier says, "8% more taxes." To the pulp and paper mill worker in Thunder Bay, the Premier says, "8% more." To families hit hard by layoffs at Xstrata, the Bay, Nortel and CTV, the Premier says, "8% more." Why won't the Premier assure Ontarians unequivocally, right now, in this Legislature, that Thursday won't mean 8% more for them and their families?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think I've spoken to the specifics of the question, but just to speak more directly to Ontarians, we have to find a way and we will find a way, through this budget, to both meet the urgent needs of our families today and, at the same time, build a stronger economy for the future. We need the Ontario economy to grow stronger; we need it to be more com-

petitive. We need our businesses to hire more Ontarians so that they can enjoy better standards of living, so that we can create more wealth in Ontario, so that we can, in turn, support good schools, good health care, good environmental protections and supports for our vulnerable. That's what it's all about.

I wish I would hear just a few more ideas from the leader of the NDP when it comes to suggestions as to what we might do to strengthen our economy, to strengthen the competitiveness of Ontario businesses so they can hire more people and create more wealth to support our public services.

SEVERANCE PAYMENTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This question is to the Premier. Across Ontario, there is a growing feeling of outrage about how laid-off workers are being treated in this province. Plant after plant, from the auto belt of southwestern Ontario to the sawmills of the north, workers by the thousands are being denied monies legally owed to them by employers who just don't seem to care. Despite the real pain and suffering of so many workers and their families, we have a government here refusing to act as the scale of this tragedy continues to grow, with more layoffs, more plant closures every day.

1050

Our Bill 6, which passed second reading in this Legislature back in 2007 and in fact went to committee, directly deals with this particular issue. I need to know why this government has refused to act on Bill 6.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: One of the areas where I believe that we can make common cause—the government and the New Democratic Party and working people in Ontario—is to convince the federal government that it needs to make changes to its bankruptcy legislation to ensure that working men and women receive preferred creditor status. At this point in time, should a company fail, should it go bankrupt, it turns out that banks and insurance companies, for example, would rate ahead of those who had been employed at the plant. We think that there should be a change to the federal laws to better protect our working men and women so that in the case of a business failure, their salaries, their compensation, would rank ahead of corporate interests.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is not just a federal issue. The primary responsibility for the sorry state of affairs lies right here with your government, the government of Ontario.

What we're talking about here are monies that are legally owed to workers, in the form of back pay, vacation pay and severance. What we're talking about are monies that are owed to loyal workers, workers who have given their lifetime to their employer.

So the question is this: Why has this government refused to make the necessary changes to the Ontario Employment Standards Act—and that's the legislation that

Bill 6 would amend—to protect workers from employers who just don't care?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to the member, we're all very saddened when anybody loses their job or when a company closes its doors.

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: The Premier, my predecessors and I have written—I've heard some of the members over there say, "Have you written? Have you advocated on this?" Yes, we have. We want to change the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to make an employee a super-first-status creditor. That's what we are asking for. I'm now asking the new leader of the third party, has she called her federal counterpart in Ottawa and asked that they do the same? Have your members contacted your MPs and asked them to change the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act? That is what we have done.

We have also advocated on the wage earner protection program—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: No, we're writing and advocating to our own government to do something to Ontario laws to make a difference for Ontario workers. That's what we're doing.

Since neither the minister nor the Premier seems to want to take responsibility for the issue, I'll tell him exactly what he needs to do. He should create a wage earner protection fund, as outlined in Bill 6, that would fully compensate workers for back pay, severance pay and holiday pay that is legally owed to them in this province. He should make changes to the Employment Standards Act that require justification for plant closures and support interventions to help keep plants open.

There are growing voices of outrage and concern in this province as we see workers walk out the doors of these plants. These laid-off workers are being treated terribly, and it's your responsibility, Minister.

Why does this government continue to ignore the voices and the plight of these workers, who deserve what is owed to them under Ontario law?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: This government has taken leadership. We have pushed the federal government on the wage earner protection program. That program has now brought forward funds. We've asked them to enrich those funds for employees who have lost their jobs.

Also, the member may or may not be aware that prior to our advocacy on the wage earner protection program, the federal government did not have termination and severance as part of that legislation. We have pushed for that. We are also asking that that be retroactive to when the wage earner protection program came into place, which was July 2008.

We continue to advocate for the hard-working men and women of this province. I would hope that that member would do the same and pick up the phone and call her federal counterpart in Ottawa.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier. Today we learned that in Ontario, employment insurance requests in January were up a staggering 43% from that time last year. Premier, that is 54,500 people who are out of work lined up at the EI office. These are part of the same families who have given you some \$27 billion in increased revenue, largely through higher taxes. You've spent every penny, so that when times got tough, the cupboards are bare. You have no plans for jobs. You've spent every penny. You've plunged us deeper in debt.

Premier, isn't this a spectacular failure in your leadership?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Michael Bryant: The government's industrial strategy is, has been and will continue to be to jump-start businesses, particularly at this time, to allow them to jump ahead of their competitors. That's why the government has invested, through grants programs, the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, loans programs, the advanced manufacturing strategy—both of which the member voted against—and made investments of millions of dollars. That has leveraged, in fact, billions of dollars of investment in this province. This capacity of the government to make these direct investments in businesses gives Ontario a jurisdictional advantage, one that will allow some businesses that are in the midst of consolidation battles to survive, which will allow them to thrive coming out of the recession. We'll continue with that strategy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'd say back to the minister, the EI requests in Hamilton are up 69%; in London, 70.3%; in Windsor, an incredible 81.6% increase in EI requests. You tell those folks what you're doing to jump-start our economy.

The Ontario PC caucus has brought forward good ideas to bring jobs back to our province and help working families. We've talked about a PST holiday on new car purchases. We talked about trading in older polluting cars for \$2,000 to put toward a new or leased car. That will jump-start jobs in our province. That will help our auto sector.

Surely to goodness, as the Minister of Economic Development, you're going to favour both of those proposals?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I say to the member, he was certainly supporting the investment in Stanpac Inc., a \$2.85-million investment in his riding in Niagara West-Glanbrook. He mentioned Windsor. The government invested \$7.1 million in Valiant; in PM Plastics in Windsor as well, significant investments to leverage millions of dollars of investments. The member, I believe, also made reference to Simcoe-Grey. The member Mr. Wilson will know about the \$15-million investment that's been made in his region, in particular to Honda.

We have been making, in every pocket of this province from the west to the east to the north, investments

directly into companies that in turn have leveraged greater investments that, in fact, have allowed us to be in a position in this province to thrive with those particular businesses, to grow those businesses—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Tomorrow, hearings begin for Bill 139, the minister's own bill looking to amend the Employment Standards Act. Will the minister make the viable and necessary amendments that are possible within the parameters of this bill to protect vulnerable foreign caregivers and workers who are so poorly protected?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Something has to be done when it comes to our live-in caregiver program. Now, through Bill 139, through temp help agencies—I have consulted with ministry officials and they have told me that it is outside the scope of that legislation.

But what I am continuing to do, when it comes to the live-in caregiver program, is advocate with the federal government. I know that they are bringing forward some proposed amendments to the temporary foreign worker program. I hope that they address the poor practices that we are seeing.

I also have a call scheduled today to speak with Minister Allan, the Minister of Labour for Manitoba, and see some of the steps they have taken to address some of the precarious practices that we have seen out there.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?
1100

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's astounding that the minister would ask a federal Conservative government to make the reforms that the minister could make immediately.

The Manitoba government has not shirked responsibility on this matter. Manitoba has taken action on licensing and regulating nanny recruitment agencies. In fact, the Manitoba Minister of Labour, Nancy Allan, is asking Ontario to borrow from that legislation. To quote her, "I wish that Fonseca would look at Manitoba's legislation. We can't be finger-pointing here and off-loading responsibility for this.... It's modern-day slavery, and we're going to put an end to it." That's what she said.

Will the minister follow the lead of the Manitoba legislation and make the necessary amendments to Bill 139 to put an end to the exploitation of foreign caregivers?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to the member that, first off, she should understand, and she should be calling her federal counterpart, that it is the federal government's responsibility to administer and monitor the live-in caregiver program. I don't know if the member heard me, but I will be speaking to the Minister of Labour for Manitoba, Nancy Allan, later today. I have a call scheduled in to her, and I will be speaking about some of the steps that they are taking. But this is the responsibility of the federal government, and we implore them to do their job.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Dave Levac: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. In late February, the communities of Dunnville and Cayuga in Haldimand county were severely impacted by the flooding of the Grand River. The severe flooding along the Grand River caused damages to the homes of many area residents and strained the resources of the community as they coped with this very unfortunate, dangerous and urgent situation.

At the time, because of a situation that you assisted with previously, I contacted your office to find out what steps could be taken by Dunnville and Cayuga to obtain support and assistance from the ministry. It's through the work of Councillor Lorne Boyko that this issue was brought to my attention, and I want to acknowledge his hard work and that of Mayor Marie Trainer and all of council who are dedicated to supporting their community.

I understand that the minister recently received an application for a disaster area to be declared for the impacted regions. Could the minister please inform the House of the status of this request today?

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me begin by thanking the honourable member for Brant, who has been front and centre in supporting the people of Dunnville and Cayuga in their time of need. This in fact is not even his riding, yet he's taking the time to get in touch with our ministry to help out. I'm not sure where the local MPP from the Conservative side is on this important issue, but thank goodness those folks in Haldimand county do have the support of the member from Brant.

Mr. Tim Hudak: On a point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Niagara West—Glanbrook is of the understanding that we do not raise points of order in here. I'll just stop the clock.

But I would say to the minister that I believe that you were crossing a line in specifically making reference to another member of the House, a member who is not present today. I would just ask that he withdraw his comment, please.

Hon. Jim Watson: I withdraw, but I'm still very pleased that the member from Brant has taken a leadership role in this particular community.

I received council's March 2 resolution requesting the Ontario disaster relief assistance program. I thank the honourable member from Brant for working with the mayor of Haldimand county as well as other councillors. I have approved the request to declare a disaster for the purposes of the ODRAP program for private losses sustained during the flood event and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Dave Levac: Minister, in fairness, I did contact the member from Haldimand—Norfolk and he contacted the mayor.

I know that members of the community in Dunnville and Cayuga are appreciative of the news of support from the government. It is a very important step to show

support, that when these things happen, the government is there to help during damage by flooding.

I know that over the years, other communities across Ontario have faced similar issues as a result of severe flooding and have applied to your ministry for assistance. The cases that come to my mind are the ones in East Ferris and Bonfield last year, in northwestern Ontario last summer, and of course the ones that most of us recognize and remember, the Peterborough area in 2004 that resulted in massive flooding.

For the benefit of the members of the House, so that we can better understand the process to provide municipalities with the direction that's needed to help people during a time of disaster, could the minister please outline the process by which a community can apply for assistance through ODRAP? It's an important issue, and I know that all communities along the river need that assistance—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Jim Watson: The individual community has to develop a disaster relief committee, which I understand they are in the process of doing in Haldimand county. I understand the committees have already begun raising funds to help cover the cost of the damage, as part of my ministry's Ontario disaster relief assistance program. We will provide a ratio of up to \$2 for every \$1 that the community has raised.

The honourable member also mentioned other floods we have been involved with in providing assistance, including in Nipissing—and my colleague from Nipissing was very helpful working with the mayor of East Ferris—Peterborough and Thunder Bay.

I thank those colleagues for working closely with the local councils, standing up to make sure they understand how the program works, and ensuring that the province of Ontario is at the table providing assistance at a very traumatic time in the lives of the people of Haldimand county.

Again, I congratulate the member for Brant for the good work he's doing in another riding.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM
FUNDING

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. It concerns the borrowed billions that the government announced yesterday, \$27.5 billion, that will in large part be borrowed to make up the \$18-billion deficit that we're told will be in the budget; that in part will consist of hard-earned dollars from the taxpayers.

Given the government's track record of fiscal mismanagement in this province, will the Premier commit today to ensuring that he will table a specific plan that sets out the application and approvals process for infrastructure projects and to which his ministers will be held accountable?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: It's nice to have the honourable member from York region back on his feet again on the matter of capital. We remember from just a few weeks ago that the honourable member was on his feet on the matter of capital, and instead of using the language like he has today, he said that we're not putting enough money into local hospital projects. So we are pleased to see that the honourable member is seemingly now in favour of capital.

For a figure that is as substantial as the one that was spoken of yesterday, of course there will be a wide variety of government ministries involved in making capital expenditure. Certainly, there are some of those circumstances where it's done on an intake basis in partnership, as an example, with municipalities. Although it is a fairly complex matter, I'll certainly endeavour to keep the honourable member informed of the nature of those intakes. An example of those would be the one—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to stand on my feet again to speak about capital, and I speak about it in the same context as I did when I last raised it, and that is with regard to accountability to the taxpayers of this province.

My question is very simple. If in fact this government is going to incur an \$18-billion deficit, and with those borrowed funds will fund infrastructure projects, the very least the taxpayers of this province are due is an explanation, a transparent process, of how the application is made, how it's approved and how those dollars will be rolled out over the next number of months.

Hon. George Smitherman: I could tell the honourable member that, of course, substantial investments that will be made over the course of the next two years are investments which are already slated to be made. But we will certainly be in a position to take advantage of the opportunity to show Ontarians, on a regional basis, on a localized basis, where actual investments are occurring.

So I think that the honourable member's question offers good advice. We've already got mechanisms in place, and I'll be very, very certain to work with the honourable member and all members of the House to make sure that they're aware of where these investments are going and where intakes are occurring to be able to achieve a list of additional projects. I'll certainly continue to do that in partnership with, as an example, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs—where, through the communities component of the Building Canada fund, we've recently announced almost 300 projects totalling more than \$1 billion of investment from three levels of government.

NIAGARA PARKS COMMISSION

Mr. Peter Kormos: To the Premier: A 1999 review and a 2004 employee survey revealed serious concerns about the Niagara Parks Commission's governance structure, yet this government has hired a high-priced con-

sultant to review the very same matters. Instead of wasting more public money on a report that's going to tell us what we already know, why doesn't this government scrap the Niagara Parks Commission and bring its responsibilities under this government's direct authority?

1110

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: As the member opposite knows, the Ontario Integrity Commissioner recently undertook a review of some questions that were put to her with regards to the Niagara Parks Commission. As part of her report back, she recommended that we undertake a governance review, which we were only too happy to do. We are undertaking a governance review of all of our tourism agencies. We will be starting with the Niagara Parks Commission. We are happy to respond in this way to the Integrity Commissioner's recommendations, and we will be moving forward in due course.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Kormos: The 2004 employee survey concluded: "Respondents feel that strategic decisions have been impacted by political influences which may not represent the best interests of the NPC as an entity."

So instead of hiring yet another high-priced consultant to defend a pretty rotten state of affairs at an unelected and unaccountable Niagara Parks Commission, why won't the minister realize that the best and most cost-effective decision is to simply scrap the commission altogether?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Thank you to the member for allowing me the opportunity to speak to the Integrity Commissioner's report and some of the recommendations that she made.

I do want to note that in the report she found no wrongdoing on the part of the Niagara Parks Commission board of directors, although she did feel that there needed to be some work to restore public confidence in the commission. To that end, she recommended a governance review, which we are undertaking.

As well, she recommended, and we are undertaking, to conduct a special audit of procurement and lease processes, an audit of recent procurement practices. We are providing guidance to facilitate accountability and sound business decisions, and we'll also be providing our board with additional governance training. These are all recommendations that were made by the Integrity Commissioner, which we are moving forward with forthwith.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: My question today is for the Minister of Economic Development.

I recently formed an organization in my riding that's called the Oakville Provincial Economic Council. It's composed of local leaders in business, education, labour, construction and finance. At our first meeting earlier this month, we discussed new ideas and best practices, and we're going to continue to develop them in future

meetings, hoping to see our community through these challenging economic times.

This group, like all of my constituents and like all Ontarians, is resilient and hard-working, and it knows that we have better times ahead. But, Minister, they've got concerns about what lies ahead. They've given me some great ideas about how we in Oakville can temper the effects of the recession, but I ask the minister today, what is our government doing to help Oakville and all of Ontario's communities to get through these difficult economic times?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I thank the member for his question.

The Premier, in fact, attended the Oakville Chamber of Commerce to announce the launch of the Open for Business initiative that will see the government provide assistance to businesses so as to relieve some of the pressure of the regulatory burden.

In addition to assisting businesses directly, the government invests. It invests through programs that funded major hospital projects, including the construction of a new hospital in Oakville and an expansion to the maternal child care unit at Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital. It has invested in Oakville's transportation system by providing \$386 million toward improvements to key highways, invested in innovation—\$1 million to Oakville-based Petro Sep for further research to help reduce industrial emissions across the globe—and has invested in the skills of our people—\$86 million in the region for school expansion and renewal projects. These are some of the ways in which this government, through the leadership of this member, has—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: There are a variety of opinions out there, Minister. I've also heard from some people that now perhaps is not the time that we should be focusing on things like child poverty or expanding social housing or investing in our health care system. Instead, some argue that economic challenges demand across-the-board cost-cutting measures like the ones the Conservatives propose. We saw the effects of this in previous governments—it resulted in cuts in nursing, to social services and our teachers—and the devastating impact that that had on this province.

Minister, do you believe across-the-board cost cutting is a right strategy for Ontario's economy at this time?

Hon. Michael Bryant: No, I do not. In fact, the government is of the view that we ought to be making investments. We ought to be, in addition to making the investments that I listed directly in Oakville, making investments in social programs to preserve social programs. It's not only from an economic perspective part of the jurisdictional advantage of Ontario, but in fact, of course, it is the McGuinty government's mandate to provide these services to Ontario. That's demonstrated through the commitment to support social services, including the increase to the Ontario child benefit this July from \$600 to a maximum of \$1,100 per child per

year; creating jobs and stimulating the economy through investment and social and affordable housing; and funding for renovation and repair to create 23,000 short-term jobs over the course of the program. This is this government's approach. It is an investment in people and skills and businesses. It is investment that will see jobs grow—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Two of us are standing. One of us is out of order, and it's not me.

New question.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is again for the Premier. Just moments ago, this House sat in special ceremony to receive our restored and transformed mace. The Premier spoke and acknowledged our parliamentary traditions and history. It's ironic that the Premier would take time to recognize one parliamentary tradition when at the same time he is wantonly breaching another, that being the convention of budget secrecy.

Yesterday, the Premier himself consciously and deliberately broke that convention when he announced the amount the government promises to spend on infrastructure over the next two years. How can the Premier on one hand pay lip service to one parliamentary tradition when, through his political strategy to leak the budget in advance, he's thrown another parliamentary convention out that front window?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to reassure all members of this House. There is a secret fear that motivates my good friend here, and that is whether or not he is going to have to bear witness to the presentation of this budget outside this hallowed chamber. That will not happen. I want to provide him with that reassurance.

I'm convinced that if there was a real concern on the part of my colleague with respect to whether or not we are in breach of anything, he would raise this matter directly with you, Speaker, and allow you to speak to this very issue. We will make announcements before the budget, through the budget, and then subsequent to the budget as well. These all represent government initiatives, matters of important public policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I say again, the issue here is not the merit of any program or promise; it is the historic convention of parliamentary secrecy. It's not that long ago that this place was in an unholy uproar because some budget documents were retrieved from a garbage can, which triggered a police investigation, and your party called for the Treasurer's resignation. It's not that long ago that in the House of Commons in Ottawa, after budget information was broadcast on Global News, the House was called into an emergency session that same night to read the budget, such was the importance of the convention of budgetary secrecy. Now, they tell us it's

okay to leak the budget to the media and select audiences over a period of weeks, in an effort to spin and manipulate the media and manage the news.

I ask the Premier the same question that he refused to answer yesterday: Will he commit to this House that there will be no further breaches of budgetary secrecy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I see the matter differently. These are important government initiatives that we announce before budgets. Some of them are announced through the budget, particularly insofar as tax measures are concerned; those are specifically reserved to budgets. And there are all kinds of announcements made subsequent to budgets. Some of those stem from the budget itself. But they're all important matters of government policy.

We think it's important for Ontarians to know what we are going to do when it comes to investing in further infrastructure. We want to stimulate this economy. We want to create some 300,000 jobs. We want to continue to build schools and hospitals, roads and bridges—those kinds of things—sometimes in partnership with the federal government, so that we can provide a little bit of hope for jobs that will come to Ontarians right now. That was the subject of the most recent announcement that we made.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, you would know by now that Kapuskasing was hit with some terrible news on Monday. Tembec announced the temporary closure of six weeks of both its sawmill and its paper mill, putting over 500 people out of work.

My question is a very simple one on behalf of the community: What specific plans do you have to ensure that these temporary layoffs don't become permanent? What are you going to do in order to safeguard that mill?

1120

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I thank the member for the question. Obviously, I'm as distressed as he is over the fact that we have a significant crisis in the forest industry. The global market has virtually plummeted. Not only have we dealt with two years of just phenomenal decrease in the demand for the products, but the last year, these last few months in particular, has been devastating.

I received the news. This is a shutdown. It's the same shutdown that has happened with another plant in Manitoba. I'm pleased to be able to report, though—and I think it's important for the member to hear and understand—that the efforts of our employees, combined with positive actions taken by the province of Ontario to reduce the effective price of electricity, have helped to improve the cost position of newsprint mills significantly. Such positive actions have been and will continue to be an integral part of the competitive position of this site. So we assume that this site will continue. What we have is an interim shutdown.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, you're missing the point. There are things you can do in order to avert this type of shutdown. We know that part of the problem that Tembec is facing is that many of the customers who buy the high-quality products that are made, as far as paper, in Kapuskasing are unable to get the credit and they're asking Tembec to secure the credit to the customers.

You've got this prosperity fund that you set up within your ministry. You have two particular funds: One is the forest sector prosperity fund, of which you have almost \$90 million that's unused, and you've got the loan guarantee program, with almost \$300 million that's unused. What I'm asking you to do is specifically this: Are you prepared to allow these particular programs to secure the credit for the customers so that they can buy the products, so that this mill can continue to operate, make money and give people jobs?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Most of the products are sold to the United States, and I believe this member is asking us to supply credit to companies in the United States. I don't believe that's part of our understanding.

There's no question that we have a significant challenge. In January of this year, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer went Web-only. That means they're not printing. In February of this year, Denver's Rocky Mountain News went under. This is just a constant reminder of the challenges facing this industry. We will continue to work with Tembec, as we have with every other mill in the sector, to provide the support that we can. They simply do not have the market. The market is not there. Where we can, we will continue to do everything we can to support this industry. We have in the past and we will continue to do so in the future.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question is for the Minister of Labour. February 28 was the 10th annual international Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day, and many people and advocates on behalf of workers across Ontario had a session to educate workers on how they can prevent this issue. Minister, I know that last week you did some health and safety blitzes to create awareness in many people across the province of Ontario. Can you tell us what you are doing in order to educate people across Ontario to prevent repetitive strain injury, or, as you prefer within your ministry, MSDs, musculoskeletal disorders?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for London-Fanshawe for his advocacy and his work, both for his constituents and for all injured workers across this great province of Ontario. Yes, during the month of April the Ministry of Labour inspectors will enhance their field activity when it comes to musculoskeletal disorders. This is part of our program Safe At Work Ontario, and these blitzes take a proactive approach, a preventive approach to working with our partners, our employers, our employees, trade unions etc. We let them know that we're going to come in and check for certain things. In this case it's going to be around MSDs. That will be the focus.

We also will be targeting some specific industries: the construction industry, mining, health care sectors and other high-risk potential producers of MSDs. However, MSDs, we all know, are really—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you, Minister. I know that repetitive strain injury takes a toll on our workforce and on financial institutions of the province of Ontario. According to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, from 2003 to 2007 they cost the board \$640 million. Besides that, we lost almost six million days of work.

Minister, can you tell us what kinds of tools you are using in your ministry in order to prevent this repetitive injury from happening, to maintain the stability of the workplace and save the workers from being injured?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Again, I thank the member for the question. The only way that we are going to achieve our targets of reducing lost-time injury rates, or all injuries, in Ontario is by working in partnership with our health and safety associations, with the WSIB, with our employers and with our joint health and safety committees.

In regard to MSD prevention, we've got a number of tools that will help our employers achieve the targets that we want, and those are some prevention guidelines accompanied by a resource manual, a toolbox and an MSD prevention resource website. So there are many different tools that can help our partners, help those employers bring forward those best practices into their workplaces.

I've had the opportunity to tour a number of companies that are doing this. They have seen a significant reduction and, at the end of this, less injury and a lot of cost savings—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. John Yakabuski: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Minister, at your recent press conference regarding the Green Energy Act, you were asked by members of the media how much the proposed act would add to the average electricity bill, to which you responded that it would only amount to 1% per year.

Minister, now that you've released the per-kilowatt-hour rates you're willing to pay under your feed-in tariff program, rates as high as 80.2 cents per kilowatt hour, what will the true increase be for Ontario families on their electricity bill?

Hon. George Smitherman: I anticipated a question of that form from the honourable member. When we did release the proposal, or I should say the Ontario Power Authority did—their proposed rates for the feed-in tariff—the member has chosen to focus in on certainly the highest rate, which is for a very small-scale rooftop solar which is designed to get many people in the province of Ontario, hopefully as many as 100,000, involved in being generators of electricity.

This would amount to about 1%, which is very clearly stated—1% of the overall energy supply mix met by that very, very expensive form of electricity generation. It's in keeping with the answer that I gave on the day that we presented the Green Energy Act. We anticipate, over three years, from 2010 to 2012, the first approximately \$5 billion of incremental investment, and over time, we expect that the Green Energy Act will contribute 1% per year to the growth of electricity costs for Ontarians, with opportunities for them to use less electricity as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I think that everybody in this province supports and believes that we need to do a better job of promoting renewable, emission-free energy. But it's also the responsibility of the government to be straightforward with the facts. When a minister talks about investing billions and billions of dollars—\$5 billion in transmission, up to 80.2 cents per kilowatt hour for feed-in tariff rates—and there are other rates, at the 44-cent level, 19 cents per kilowatt hour for wind. At those rates, all of that is being put back to the base rate-payers of the hydro bill.

Will you not come clean to the people of Ontario and state clearly that your belief and position that it will mean 1% to the hydro bill is simply a deliberate misrepresentation of the facts?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the honourable member to withdraw his comment.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Sorry, I withdraw it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. George Smitherman: There are a couple of things that I think are pretty important here. Firstly, it's wonderful to see the endorsement of the Green Energy Act and the principle of renewable energy. As the honourable member said, pretty much everybody—I think he said everybody in Ontario supports and believes that there should be more renewable energy. I think that's a good start. I appreciate the support from the honourable member.

I think one of the things that's important is that the Green Energy Act is about, on the one hand, creating the opportunity for more renewable energy, and on the other, providing people in their homes, businesses and institutions the opportunity to go about their lives and use less electricity and energy. This obviously balances off on the issue of cost.

1130

I would say to the honourable member that he really could do just a little bit better research. I have spoken about a \$5-billion investment, and I've been quite clear in saying that just about half of that will be focused on transmission and distribution. The honourable member, in his question, turned that into \$5 billion for transmission. I think it would be very beneficial if he took the offer that I've given him. Let's sit down and talk about this more so that I can show this on a—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Deputy Premier. Real estate values in today's economic climate are decreasing daily, but homes were unfairly and arbitrarily valued 15 months ago, some in the city of Toronto, as much as 45% higher, some in your own riding.

What is the government's plan for assisting people to cope with tax increases that could force some from their homes and are forcing many businesses into bankruptcy?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: As the honourable member is well aware—as a former mayor himself, he understands that an increase in property assessment does not necessarily equate to an increase in property tax, point number one. But secondly, the other point that we're quite proud of that the Minister of Finance brought in his budget is an increase to a property-tax grant program for senior citizens, to allow senior citizens to stay in their homes longer. Regrettably, the NDP voted against that budget and subsequently voted against the senior citizens throughout the province of Ontario.

One of the things that we've tried to do over the course of our term of government is to take pressure off the property taxpayer and bring it back to where it rightfully should be, at the provincial level, through a series of uploading initiatives that I would be very pleased to elaborate on in my supplementary, as a result of signing the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: Every day people are being forced from their homes, and every day businesses are forced to pay increasing amounts of taxes, even when they're not profitable. The minister knows full well that this is the case.

This Legislature has heard from many thousands of people across Ontario who know that the province's assessment system is broken and is beyond repair. They know this government can do the right thing, and we are asking you to support the NDP's freeze-till-sale plan.

Why won't this government help people to stay in their homes, especially now? And why won't they support businesses to prosper in Ontario and support the freeze-till-sale assessment plan?

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me just reiterate some of the things that we've done to bring property tax relief, not just to the people of Toronto but throughout the province of Ontario. In the city of Toronto, since 2003, total ongoing funding that has been sent up until now is \$368.9 million on an annual basis, and, in addition, \$496 million in one-time funding, for a grand total, since the McGuinty government came to office, of \$865 million to the taxpayers and the city of Toronto.

Mayor David Miller, upon signing the historic agreement between AMO, the city of Toronto and the province of Ontario, said, "Today's announcement shows very clearly that this provincial government has both

listened and acted in response to the needs of our communities. The provincial government came to the table, worked closely with us, and got the principles right. We have set forward on a new course."

I'm very proud of that agreement, and I urge the honourable member to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Pat Hoy: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. The global recession is affecting everyone. Communities both large and small in this province are being affected by shrinking profits, job cuts and plant closures. Farmers have been struggling with low market prices and high input costs. Small businesses and manufacturing companies are cutting back their payrolls and closing down in some instances.

Funding for infrastructure is needed to create jobs in the short term and enhance productivity in the long term. The health of our economy in rural Ontario is essential to bringing back growth to the rest of the province. Farmers and small-town Ontarians need to know that their government is on their side.

Can the minister speak about the unique challenges that rural Ontarians face and describe what our government is doing to protect and create jobs in rural communities across the province?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Our government has been there for rural communities and for farmers, and we will continue to be there. I think that we have some very concrete examples: \$1.2 billion since 2003 to support farm incomes; \$56 million over the next four years for a buy-Ontario strategy; and in the 2008 budget, we also have set aside \$30 million for rural economic development as well as \$30 million over the next four years for infrastructure.

These are investments that our agriculture and rural partners have told us they need, and we have met that for them. We have been there and we will continue to be there for rural Ontario and farmers in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period having ended, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Bob Delaney: I am very pleased to introduce three very important guests today. I'd like to introduce Richie Mehta from my riding of Mississauga—Streetsville and his mom and his brother, who are here visiting Queen's Park and about whom I will be making a member's statement shortly.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have with us in the Speaker's gallery Ms. Fawzia Rauofi of the National Assembly of Afghanistan. She is accompanied by her husband, Mr. Roshan, her sister-in-law Ms. Hafiza

Khadem, and by the vice-consul of the Consulate General of Afghanistan at Toronto, Ms. Mashal Sidqi.

I had the opportunity to meet with them just prior, and it was one of the most rewarding meetings I've ever had to get the perspective of a politician from Afghanistan of what it's like on the ground there. I want to say thank you very much for that opportunity, and I would ask all members to please welcome our guests to the Speaker's gallery today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ASSISTANCE TO THE DISABLED

Mr. Ted Arnott: Disabled Ontarians have so much to contribute to this province, but in many cases they need the help of attendant services to fulfill their full potential. That's why so many Ontarians have written to me recently to express their appreciation that this Legislature, with the backing of the Ontario Community Support Association, passed my resolution calling upon the provincial government to add attendant services to the provincial wait times strategy and to allocate funding according to how many individuals actually require services.

Debbie Black, a constituent of mine, got the ball rolling when she visited my office last summer. She told me about wait times of up to 10 years for attendant services, and I found that to be absolutely unacceptable. And so should we all. I want to express my sincere thanks to Debbie for her advocacy on this crucial issue.

As well, Lori Payne and others at the Ontario Community Support Association also deserve our thanks for their good work. Lori collected petitions with hundreds of signatures, which I was pleased to present yesterday before this Legislature.

I hope that the government will follow through on the overwhelming support for my resolution both inside and outside this House. In this Thursday's provincial budget, I hope the government will give this important and urgent health care priority the attention it deserves.

ONTARIO CONFEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY FACULTY ASSOCIATIONS

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I would like to welcome members of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, or OCUFA, to Queen's Park. They're here with us today. This organization represents 24 faculty associations and over 15,000 university faculty and academic librarians in Ontario. Their mandate is to maintain and enhance the quality of higher education in Ontario.

They have recently released a report as part of their Quality Matters campaign, and the report has confirmed what we have known for a long time in Ontario: over-subscribed courses without enough seats for students, larger classes, classes folded into other classes when a

faculty member retires, fewer full-time faculty, less student-faculty interaction, fewer labs and individualized assignments. They are here today at Queen's Park to offer solutions to these serious threats to quality education.

With us today is Professor Brian E. Brown, president of OCUFA and the faculty association of the University of Windsor. They are hosting their reception this evening here at Queen's Park from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in room 230. They would like a lot of us to go, and I'm urging many government members and the other opposition members to join them this evening.

DOMINIC AGOSTINO

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Five years ago today, Dominic Agostino, a dear friend to many and former MPP for Hamilton East, tragically passed away. Whether you knew Dominic as a colleague or a friend, his infectious energy was matched only by his dedication to public service. Today, Dominic's legacy lives on both within this House and his community of Hamilton.

In this House, we remember a strong leader who believed intensely in the reason we are all here today: to improve the lives of those both within our communities and across this great province. His unrelenting passion for Hamilton and Ontario made Dominic a spirited and highly valued member of this Legislature. Within Hamilton and among Hamiltonians, Dominic's legacy is cherished and celebrated.

On November 5, 2008, Dominic was inducted posthumously into Hamilton's Gallery of Distinction. With this, he joined 150 other inspiring individuals who have made a significant contribution to the great city of Hamilton.

Five years ago, we were fortunate to have Dominic with us in this chamber; now we are fortunate to have his story and his spirit, one we can share with future Hamiltonians, Ontarians and parliamentarians. We miss him.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to pay tribute to the estimated 9,000 Ontarians who will be receiving Ontario Volunteer Service Awards this year. They represent more than five million citizens who volunteer in their communities.

When I think of volunteers who are making a difference in Ontario, I think of people like my constituent John Schoonderbeek of Mitchell Corners. He was among just nine individuals from across Canada recognized with the Clean World Award for Pitch-In Canada last year. These awards were signed by Governor General Michaëlle Jean, who is an honorary patron to Pitch-In Canada.

John is an outstanding steward of the environment who walks seven kilometres each day picking up litter and debris he finds along the roadside. His personal commitment to the environment started on Earth Day about 15 years ago. John Schoonderbeek also received

the Ontario Medal for Good Citizenship, presented by the Ontario Minister of Citizenship, Mike Colle, in 2007. John's effort as a volunteer includes helping seniors in his community so that they can stay in their homes longer. Mr. Schoonderbeek is the kind of dedicated volunteer who works hard each day to make his community a better place to live.

I'm proud to say that approximately 100 volunteers from Durham were recognized at local award ceremonies last year. Many worked 25, 30, 40—for example, Brenton Rickard, who has served in the Newcastle Lions Club for over 60 years.

At a time when our communities are working hard to ensure the future of our local hospitals, it's interesting to note that dozens of the volunteers honoured in my riding work within the hospital and the community care group. This demonstrates the importance we place on health care close to home.

Volunteers do not work for recognition, but they do deserve our thanks. That is why I'm speaking today: to thank them personally for the work that they do in our community to make it better for all Ontarians.

RICHIE MEHTA

Mr. Bob Delaney: I rise today to celebrate the recent success of a critically acclaimed film director from Mississauga—Streetsville who is here today. Richie Mehta is joined by his mother, Neeta Tandon, and his brother, Kurran Mehta. I'd like members to welcome them.

Richie Mehta recently directed his first feature film, *Amal*, which tells the tale of an Indian rickshaw driver who inherits an eccentric billionaire's fortune. *Amal* debuted at the 2007 Toronto International Film Festival. Accolades for both Richie and the film have snowballed ever since. *Amal* has won more than 25 international awards, and it was recently nominated for six Genie Awards, including best picture and best director.

Richie attended John Fraser Secondary School and the University of Toronto's art and art history and cinema studies programs. He completed his postgraduate studies at Sheridan College's advanced film and television program in Toronto. He attended the first Berlinale Talent Campus in the 2002 Berlin film festival. He studied under the guidance of directors such as Wim Wenders and has been mentored by directors such as Shekhar Kapur and Brian De Palma.

Richie Mehta is an outstanding ambassador for our cultural industries here in Ontario. As his star continues to rise, remember, you heard about him here first. Congratulations, Richie Mehta, the pride of western Mississauga.

1510

DOROTHY JANE NEEDLES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: This morning I had the pleasure of presenting an award to Dorothy Jane Needles. She is the deserving recipient of an Ontario Heritage Trust award for her contributions toward cultural heritage in her

community of Mono, in the beautiful riding of Dufferin—Caledon.

As we know, heritage preservation must be embraced by the people it touches most. These are the people who live in our communities and join with their neighbours to protect buildings, natural heritage sites and cultural artifacts. They are the storytellers. They understand local history and pass it on from generation to generation. They give us an understanding of who we are and where we come from. It is important that communities show their appreciation to their volunteers who assume leadership roles in preserving our community's heritage.

Dorothy Jane Needles is a leader and well deserving of the honour she received this morning. She has recognized the importance of heritage and leadership and makes outstanding contributions to our community.

It is always a pleasure to be able to recognize those who make contributions to our community and within it. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many other volunteers who make my riding of Dufferin—Caledon the vibrant cultural and historic community it is today.

PATHWAYS TO EDUCATION

Mr. Mike Colle: On March 10, I was joined by Premier Dalton McGuinty, Minister Kathleen Wynne and Minister John Milloy at Sir Sandford Fleming Academy in my riding, and together we announced the first-year results of the Pathways to Education program hosted at the New Heights Community Health Centre in my riding. The Pathways program provides academic tutoring, mentoring, counselling and financial support to students who are at risk of dropping out of school.

The first-year results were tremendous. I'm proud to say that the students from Lawrence Heights are leading the pack with the highest rates of success. I was fortunate enough to meet the students enrolled in the Pathways program at Sir Sandford Fleming, students like Naima Mayany, Jameel Dawkins, Mohammed Adan, Naseem Ali, Lammi Hassan, Cassandra Cormier, Malala Hakimi, Fatima Sufi, Issa Mohammed and many more. These are extremely bright students, many of whom will be the first generation in their families to graduate high school and continue on to post-secondary education.

I would like to thank the Premier and the ministers who attended. I'd also like to thank the director of the Pathways program in Lawrence Heights, Owen Christopher Hinds, and the program administrator, Rebecca Houwer, who, along with their colleagues, are committed to helping our students succeed.

To Principal Arnold Witt, Vice-Principal Reiko Fuentes, and the staff and students of Sir Sandford Fleming, I want to thank them all and say, great success. May you go on to do bigger and better things as a result of Pathways.

KYLE MAYHEW

Mr. Phil McNeely: It is my pleasure to rise in the Legislature today to recognize an Olympian from my

riding of Ottawa–Orléans: Kyle Mayhew. At 22, Kyle has been skating for 10 years with the Ottawa Blades Special Olympics figure skating program, and is a member of Skate Canada, eastern Ontario. He qualified for Team Canada by winning a gold medal for level 2 men at the 2008 National Winter Games and was selected to compete at the 2009 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Boise, Idaho, this February.

The eight-day competition brought together an estimated 3,000 athletes from 85 countries to compete in seven winter sports, including figure skating. At the games, Kyle's training and dedication to his sport paid off in full, with Kyle taking home a silver medal in figure skating. Congratulations to Kyle for all his success.

I would also like to recognize Kyle's support team, who have helped him achieve such success. Anne Marie Bergeron, a long-time volunteer and advocate for Special Olympics figure skating, worked diligently to develop Kyle's winning figure skating routine that awed the judges. Cathy Skinner of the Gloucester Skating Club is Kyle's coach and was instrumental in keeping Kyle focused and ready for great success.

Once again, congratulations and best of luck to Kyle during his ongoing training.

SCOTT VERNELLI

Mr. David Oraziatti: I rise in the House today to comment on a tragic event that has taken the lives of four young men and to express my condolences to the families who have been affected by the deaths of four soldiers killed in Afghanistan during this past week.

One of those soldiers killed in the most recent attack was from my riding of Sault Ste. Marie. Master Corporal Scott Vernelli, 28 years old, was with the 3rd battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment and he was based at CFB Petawawa. We all owe Corporal Vernelli and the men and women like him who lost their lives while on duty a debt of gratitude because they made the ultimate sacrifice.

The tragic loss of Corporal Vernelli from Sault Ste. Marie saddens our entire community. I offer my sincere condolences to his wife, Marcie, her daughter, Olivia, and to the entire Vernelli family. We have lost a soldier, husband and father who truly loved his job and dedicated his life to the service of our country.

Everyone expects that when their husband, wife, son or daughter goes to work, they'll come home, but this tragic event is a constant reminder of the countless dangers faced by our soldiers each day in Afghanistan.

In a day and age when our access to information through media inundates us with lawlessness and the conflict in many parts of the world, we are reminded of the vital role our soldiers fulfill in combating terrorism, building democracy and serving all of us.

The immeasurable sorrow felt by the Vernelli family cannot be consoled by any words said today, so all I can humbly offer is our sincere gratitude for Corporal Vernelli's selfless commitment to his job and to his

country. Today I'd like to convey my appreciation for his efforts and the efforts of our entire military family for working to make the world a better place. Scott's efforts and contributions should be celebrated and remembered. We honour and thank these brave men and women who have served, and our thoughts and prayers are with their families.

I'd respectfully ask for a moment of silence for Master Corporal Vernelli.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask all members and our guests to join me in a moment of silence, please.

The House observed a moment's silence.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TRANSPARENCY IN PUBLIC MATTERS ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA TRANSPARENCE DES QUESTIONS D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC

Mr. Craiton moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 159, An Act to require that meetings of provincial and municipal boards, commissions and other public bodies be open to the public / Projet de loi 159, Loi exigeant que les réunions des commissions et conseils provinciaux et municipaux et d'autres organismes publics soient ouvertes au public.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Kim Craiton: The bill is designed to bring transparency to Ontario agencies, boards and commissions. It designates certain public bodies that receive financing or act on behalf of the government to give reasonable notice to the public of their meetings, of proposed additions to the meetings, and to ensure that meetings are open to the public. As well, it requires them to keep minutes of meetings and to publish them. Finally, the bill establishes a procedure by which a person who believes a designated public body has contravened or is about to contravene the bill may make a complaint to the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and it makes it an offence to fail to comply with an order from the privacy commissioner.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ONTARIO PROVINCIAL POLICE

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I rise in the House today to mark the 100th anniversary of the Ontario Provincial Police and to celebrate 100 years of service to the province by OPP officers both past and present.

As a northerner, I have a very special attachment to the OPP. In the early 1900s, it was these officers who maintained order in the rapid settlement of Ontario's northern frontier, including the mining and forestry communities that were springing up all over the north.

Every police officer who has worn the badge of the OPP, and every civilian employee or auxiliary member who has supported them, is a builder. They built a dedicated and diverse police service that is the envy of the world for how it meets the law enforcement challenges of the 21st century. The proof is highly visible, in black and white, along our highways, inside our communities, on our lakes and rivers and in the air.

1520

The OPP's first 100 years have been bookended by two exceptional individuals: Superintendent Joseph E. Rogers, whose leadership brought the OPP to life, and our current commissioner, Julian Fantino, who has set the stage for the next 100 years. Indeed, during its 100 years the OPP has been guided by leaders of great integrity and vision, among them Commissioner Eric Silk, who modernized the OPP in the 1960s, and Commissioner Gwen Boniface, the first female to hold this position. Together, these leaders have nurtured the OPP from a small force of approximately 50 members to one of the largest deployed police services in North America, with an international reputation for excellence in criminal investigations, traffic management and community policing.

This 100th anniversary provides a unique opportunity for the OPP to connect with the communities it serves by showcasing its accomplishments, both historical and present-day, at local detachments across Ontario. In early February, I participated in the launch of the commemorative patrol in Hearst. This was a 21-day tribute to how the OPP officers with dogs and sleds patrolled the north some 100 years ago. It was truly an historic event, extremely well attended by the people of Hearst and along the northern line.

Upcoming events include the opening of Frontiers: A century of policing, at the OPP Museum in Orillia this April, the launch of Arresting Images, a travelling exhibition of mug shots from the museum collection in May, and an OPP centenary tattoo in Oshawa this September. There will also be special OPP celebrations at major sporting and community events all year long.

But this anniversary is more than the chance for the OPP to strut its stuff; it is an opportunity for Ontarians to show their appreciation to the dedicated men and women who wear the uniform of one of the finest police services in the world, and I implore and encourage all Ontarians to go out and do so. It is also a fitting time to remember the 102 brave OPP officers who have lost their lives in the line of duty. Their names are forever etched on the Wall of Honour at OPP headquarters in Orillia as a tribute to their service and sacrifice.

I hope all members of the House will join me in sending best wishes to the approximately 9,600 uniformed and civilian members and the 900 auxiliary members of the Ontario Provincial Police as we celebrate 100 years of service excellence to the citizens of Ontario.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Hon. Michael Chan: I rise today to talk about a time-honoured tradition in the province, the Ontario Volunteer Service Award. This year, more than 9,000 Ontarians will be recognized in 46 Ontario Volunteer Service Award ceremonies in 35 communities across the province, from Windsor to Ottawa, from Dryden to Vittoria. It all begins this Wednesday, March 25, in Stratford and wraps up on June 30 in Kingston.

The Volunteer Service Award ceremonies are well received throughout the province. Ontario volunteers give so much to their communities. These awards are the way Ontarians give back to the volunteers, our way of saying thank you to thousands of everyday heroes who make our communities strong and vibrant places in which we live.

Last year I had the opportunity to attend a number of these ceremonies. I was amazed how humble these incredible, generous people were with the recognition given to them. Each volunteer is given a certificate and a pin indicating the number of years of continuous service they have given to the organization that nominated them. Pins are given out for five, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 40, 50 and even 60 years of service. Youth pins are also given out to young people who have given at least two years of community volunteer service with an organization. With the long-time volunteers, it is not uncommon to see them wearing pins received at previous ceremonies. They wear them with pride.

I know that many of my parliamentary colleagues will honour their constituents by attending these events. For those of you who have not had an opportunity to attend a ceremony or have not attended one in a little while, I strongly encourage you to do so this year.

While the Ontario Volunteer Service Award recognizes established volunteers, last year my ministry started a new program to encourage young people to pick up the tradition of volunteerism. During the National Volunteer Week, which is April 19 to 25, the second Change the World: Ontario Youth Volunteer Challenge will be in full swing. The goal is to have 10,000 young people between the ages of 14 and 18 volunteer during the week. The Ontario government is partnering with 20 volunteer centres across the province to deliver that challenge.

In addition, the Ontario Medal for Young Volunteers and the June Callwood Outstanding Achievement Awards for Voluntarism ceremonies will be held during National Volunteer Week.

As you can imagine, our plate is full to kick-start once again the wonderful Ontario Volunteer Awards ceremonies.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

ONTARIO PROVINCIAL POLICE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to respond to the comments made by the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services on the 100th anniversary of the

OPP. I want to say, on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, we're very proud of our history working with the OPP and we congratulate the OPP on this historic moment in their history, particularly Commissioner Julian Fantino, who is in charge of the OPP today, and President Karl Walsh of the Ontario Provincial Police Association, which looks after the approximately 9,000 people who work for the Ontario Provincial Police.

I just want to say also while I have the floor today—the minister mentioned a number of events going on. I think it's a really good time to promote an event that we're having this Saturday night up at Casino Rama. It's a fundraising gala. All the proceeds will go to the OPP Museum at the general headquarters. It's being put on by an organization that's about two years old now called the Friends of the OPP Museum. I know a number of you, including the Speaker, have presented silent auction gifts to me that we can present this Saturday night. People will bid on those, and all those proceeds will go to the OPP Museum in this historic year.

I wanted to also say that at this particular event this weekend, part of the entertainment being put on is the OPP Pipes and Drums, as well as Ms. Liz Hurtubise, who is the daughter of an officer who was actually shot and recovered in a terrible tragedy involving a gun shooting about 20 years ago. A bridge was named after his partner, another OPP officer, who died that night, Richard Verdecchia, whom we honoured this year as well.

The OPP has a rich history. I want to go back to talking about the museum for a moment. One of the things in the history of the OPP that I'm always excited to see when I walk into the museum, and something that I think is very unique, is the fact that Paul McCartney and the Beatles in their album—everybody here would remember the Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band album. He actually wore an OPP badge on his shoulder, and that uniform is in the OPP Museum. Mind you, we don't move that thing around; it stays there.

In summary, I congratulate the OPP on a wonderful history, and I look forward to the next 100 years of the Ontario Provincial Police.

1530

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to thank the minister for speaking out in support of and thanking the many volunteers who work in Ontario. As he said, over 9,000 volunteers will receive awards this year. This represents over five million citizens who contribute to their community each year, some of whom, as I say, are being recognized.

When I think of volunteerism, I look at our own community, and I think of the initiative that was taken when we were government to encourage youth in Ontario to contribute in their communities with the voluntary 40 hours of community service while in high school. I think that's a good introduction for young people and for all of us—that when asked to volunteer or to commit to your

community, just say yes. It's a wonderful experience to give back to a community that we owe so much to.

That's really what I wanted to say, but I'd be remiss not to recognize my community.

Last night, for instance, there was an interclub meeting that I attended in my riding. That interclub represents all of the volunteer organizations—fraternal organizations as well as community service organizations—like Rotarians, Lions, Kinsmen, Legion club, the Knights of Columbus and others. These are all leaders in the community whom I see in many different roles. They serve on hospital foundations, they serve on hospital auxiliaries, they serve in volunteer parent groups, they serve as Scout and Cub leaders. That's what building strong communities is all about. I thank the minister and the government for taking the time to recognize that and say thank you.

These community awards, these pins that they get, are in themselves emblematic of time served, but more importantly, it is time to be thanked for giving back voluntarily to others.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention John Schoonderbeek, whom I spoke of earlier today, who was recognized by Governor General Michaëlle Jean for his work in making our environment cleaner and our community cleaner. John walks about seven kilometres each day picking up litter along roadsides, amongst other projects, and he's been doing that for 15 years, ever since Earth Day. He was asked to pitch in. He did. What it's led to is recognition but also thanks from our community for making it a cleaner and better place for everyone to live.

So it's a time to celebrate, but more importantly, to say thank you to all the volunteers in our community.

ONTARIO PROVINCIAL POLICE

Mr. Peter Kormos: New Democrats are pleased to stand on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Ontario Provincial Police and join in congratulating them and thanking them for their service to this province.

Police officers in the Ontario Provincial Police in most of southern Ontario are seen most likely on our 400-series highways, highways that are becoming more and more difficult to police—denser and denser traffic—and indeed more and more dangerous to police. In fact, police officers have paid with their lives during the course of investigations of highway accidents on those very, very packed and dense highways.

In other parts of the province, though, OPP are the sole police officers in some of the most remote and isolated parts of Ontario, with special, additional pressures on them in terms of the policing that they're called upon to do.

We can't expect our police officers—hard-working, dedicated, disciplined women and men—to do this dangerous and increasingly complex job without giving them the tools and the resources they need to do it. New Democrats stand once again in this Legislature committing ourselves to ensuring that our police services,

Ontario Provincial Police in this instance, are adequately staffed and have the tools they need to perform the work that they're called upon to do.

I want to make a special note, because there was a regrettable time in this province's history when the Golden Helmets—you'll know who they are: OPP officers who do precision motorcycle riding. There was a tragic time in this province when a Liberal Premier disbanded the Golden Helmets and people across Ontario didn't have the benefit of seeing these precision motorcycle riders. I'm pleased to see that they're back in full force.

Two years ago, Johnny Clare, who owns Clare's Cycle and Sports down on Highway 20, one of the best Harley-Davidson dealerships in Ontario—and OPP officers know that—sponsored the OPP Golden Helmets coming down to Niagara. They started out in Pelham and did a procession through Pelham and down to the Welland airport, where they put on a show that was free to the public. The people in that region were so excited to see the Golden Helmets back in fine form and in full force. Of course, that was the prelude to the motorcycle show—mostly Harleys and custom-built bikes—that Johnny Clare sponsors in Pelham.

I've had far too many good experiences with OPP officers in my earlier career as a lawyer, and from time to time as I've met them on our highways we've had an opportunity to say hello and wish each other well.

We New Democrats certainly wish those brave, dedicated police officers and civilian staff the very best.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm pleased, along with the minister and the speaker for the opposition, to recognize the generous spirit, dedication and sacrifice shown by the tens of thousands—millions, in fact—of volunteers throughout Ontario.

There's no question that Ontarians willingly give of their time to make their communities better. They go out of their way. They take on tasks to make sure that our lives are improved. We know about the need for volunteers.

The role of volunteers is to enhance our lives, or should be to enhance our lives, but virtually every time the minister made this speech and each time I've had a chance to respond to him, the reality has been that more and more social services in this province, and critical tasks that should be taken on by government, have been pushed onto the shoulders of volunteers.

In this province, increasingly the provision of food, shelter, education, health care and other social services is taken on by volunteers who already have their plates full, who are already dealing with issues in their communities but know that things that have been abandoned by government can't be left abandoned and have to be addressed.

People at emergency shelters are volunteering there because there's not adequate housing built in this prov-

ince, and it should be built, and this provincial government is responsible for that. People are volunteering at food banks. Because this government hasn't put in place a high enough minimum wage, has not paid attention to our manufacturing infrastructure and does not have adequate levels of social assistance, people are hungry. Volunteers try to cover some of that gap through working in food banks.

People in Ontario are raising \$600 million a year for local public schools because the government of Ontario is not adequately funding our education system.

We should recognize the sacrifice of volunteers, we need to recognize their contributions, but I say to you, Speaker, and to all others who are listening to this or watching this that we should truly honour our volunteers by making sure they don't have to make up for the tasks the government has abandoned.

PETITIONS

ASSISTANCE TO THE DISABLED

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas essential attendant services, critical community-based services that make it possible for Ontarians with physical disabilities to lead fulfilling lives, are extremely underfunded in the province of Ontario, and wait times for attendant services in Ontario have reached unprecedented crisis levels. Due to unmet need, the wait-lists for people with physical disabilities range from four to 10 years;

"I, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately address the crisis facing physically disabled Ontarians who are waiting four to 10 years for attendant services by adding attendant services to the provincial wait times strategy and by instituting individually based funding for all physically disabled persons requiring attendant care."

I of course support this petition and affix my signature as well.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and I definitely want to thank Krista Wilson of Kenning Hall Boulevard in Streetsville for having collected the signatures for me. The petition reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the

ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its ... capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am very pleased to sign and certainly support this petition, and to ask page Renée to carry it for me.

1540

MOTORCYCLE SAFETY

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly signed by constituents from all over my riding of Bruce-Grey and beyond. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas to impose a total ban on an activity or sport under the guise of protecting the public from injury as presented by MPP Helena Jaczek in Bill 117 to amend the Highway Traffic Act, section 38.1, 'No person shall drive or operate a motorcycle on a highway if another person under the age of 14 years is a passenger on the motorcycle,' would be an injustice to us, the people of Ontario; and

"Whereas the restrictive aspects of this proposal far outweigh the minor risks associated and confirmed by the annual Ministry of Transportation statistical safety reports, and further, there is no clear distinction that 'motorcycle-related injuries' apply to Ontario streets or highways, as stated in defence of Bill 117;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Request that Bill 117 be rejected and not become law."

I have signed this, and I'm going to give it to Sarah.

SALES TAX

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank Ward Bond, who's the dealer principal of Blue Mountain Honda. It's a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the auto industry in Ontario and throughout North America is experiencing a major restructuring; and

"Whereas the current economic crisis is affecting the auto manufacturers and the front-line dealerships throughout Ontario; and

"Whereas many potential automobile purchasers are having difficulty accessing credit even at current prices; and

"Whereas a three-month tax holiday of the GST and the PST on the purchase of new and used cars and trucks would stimulate auto sales;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the provincial and federal governments to implement a three-month tax holiday, and that the Ontario Minister of Finance include the PST holiday in the next provincial budget."

I agree with this petition, and I've signed it.

INTERPROVINCIAL BRIDGE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas:

"(1) ROCHE-NCE, a consulting firm hired to study potential sites for an interprovincial crossing between Ottawa and Gatineau, is recommending that an interprovincial bridge across the Ottawa River be built at Kettle Island, connecting to the scenic Aviation Parkway in Ottawa, turning it into a four-lane commuter and truck route passing through downtown residential communities;

"(2) Along the proposed route are homes, seniors' apartments, schools, parks, the Montfort Long Term Care Facility and the Montfort Hospital, all of which would be severely impacted by noise, vibration and disease-causing air pollution;

"(3) A truck and commuter route through neighbourhoods is a safety issue because of the increased risk to pedestrians and cyclists and the transport of hazardous materials; and

"(4) There are other, more suitable corridors further east, outside of the downtown core, which would have minimal impact on Ottawa residents;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To reject the recommendation of a bridge at Kettle Island and to select a more suitable corridor to proceed to phase 2 of the interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study."

I agree with this petition and send it to the table through page Emily.

SALES TAX

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition from Bickley Ford Sales Ltd. in Huntsville to do with the auto industry, and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the auto industry in Ontario and throughout North America is experiencing a major restructuring; and

"Whereas the current economic crisis is affecting the auto manufacturers and the front-line dealerships throughout Ontario; and

"Whereas many potential automobile purchasers are having difficulty accessing credit even at current prices; and

"Whereas a three-month tax holiday of the PST on the purchase of new cars and trucks would stimulate auto sales;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario implement a three-month PST tax holiday on new vehicle purchases and that the Ontario Minister of Finance include this PST holiday in the next provincial budget."

I support this petition, and I will give it to page Noel.

TOM LONGBOAT

Mr. Rick Johnson: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Tom Longboat, a proud son of the Onondaga Nation, was one of the most internationally celebrated athletes in Canadian history;

"Whereas Tom Longboat was voted as the number one Canadian athlete of the 20th century by Maclean's magazine for his record-breaking marathon and long-distance triumphs against the world's best;

"Whereas Tom Longboat fought for his country in World War I and was wounded twice during his tour of duty;

"Whereas Tom Longboat is a proud symbol of the outstanding achievements and contributions of Canada's aboriginal people;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario."

I support this petition.

POLICE RECORDS CHECK

Mr. Michael Prue: I have a petition. It's rather long, but I'd like to read it in full because I'm only going to present it once.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas, under current practice, police services across Ontario retain records of accompaniment to the hospital for mental health assessment. Accompaniment to the hospital is permitted under the Mental Health Act. Many employers, volunteer agencies and educational facilities request a police records check prior to hiring an applicant or allowing them to volunteer if they will be working with children, seniors or persons with disabilities. Most police services release Mental Health Act records as part of the police records check. In order to continue the application process, the applicant must disclose the record to the potential employer or forgo the position out of fear of further discrimination and the desire to keep health information confidential. The practice of releasing these records violates the privacy rights, as well as the human rights, of Ontarians with Mental Health Act records. We ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass legislation that would prohibit the disclosure of Mental Health Act records as part of the police records check process;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The current practice of disclosing information regarding non-criminal contact with police pursuant to the Mental Health Act discriminates against Ontarians with both diagnosed and perceived mental health disabilities. We believe this information constitutes personal health information and as such should not be released as part of a police records check. Only criminal convictions for which a pardon has not been granted and records from the pardoned sex offender database should be released on a police records check.

"We petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass legislation which would protect the human rights of all Ontarians by prohibiting the disclosure of Mental Health Act records."

I am agreement and will sign my name thereto.

LUPUS

Mr. Kim Craiton: I want to thank Debi Duval from the Sudbury branch of Lupus Ontario for giving me this petition, and I'm proud to read it in. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

TUITION

Mr. Jim Wilson: I have a petition from the graduate association of the University of Windsor.

"Whereas undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have increased by 195% since 1990 and are the third-highest in all of the provinces in Canada; and

"Whereas average student debt in Ontario has skyrocketed by 250% in the last 15 years to over \$25,000 for four years of study; and

"Whereas international students pay three to four times more for the same education, and domestic students

in professional programs such as law or medicine pay as much tuition as \$20,000 per year; and

“Whereas 70% of new jobs require post-secondary education, and fees reduce the opportunity for many low- and middle-income families while magnifying barriers for aboriginal, rural, racialized and other marginalized students; and

“Whereas Ontario currently provides the lowest per capita funding for post-secondary education in Canada, while many countries fully fund higher education and charge little or no fees for college and university; and

“Whereas public opinion polls show that nearly three quarters of Ontarians think the government’s Reaching Higher framework for tuition fee increases of 20% to 36% over four years is unfair;

“Therefore, we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students’ call to immediately drop tuition fees to 2004 levels and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to introduce a new framework that:

“(1) Reduces tuition and ancillary fees annually for students.

“(2) Converts a portion of every student loan into a grant.

“(3) Increases per student funding above the national average.”

I’ve signed that petition. Thank you.

1550

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Jeff Leal: I’m pleased to present a petition today on behalf of Wayne Herlick from RR 2, Tavistock, Ontario.

To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Honourable Leona Dombrowsky, has publicly stated that she ‘absolutely’ wants to help the beginning and new entrants to agriculture; and

“Whereas beginning and expanding farmers are going to be important in the coming decade, as a record number of producers are expected to leave the industry; and

“Whereas the safety net payments—i.e., Ontario cattle, hog and horticulture payments (OCHHP)—are based on historical averages, and many beginning and expanding farmers were not in business or just starting up in the period so named and thus do not have reflective historic allowable net sales (ANS); and

“Whereas beginning and expanding producers are likely at the greatest risk of being financially disadvantaged by poor market conditions and are being forced to exit agriculture because there is not a satisfactory safety net program or payment that meets their needs;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To immediately adjust the safety net payments made via the OCHHP to include beginning and expanding farmers, and make a relief payment to the beginning and expanding farmers who have been missed or received

seriously disproportionate payments, thereby preventing beginning farmers from exiting the agriculture sector.”

I will put my signature on this and give it to page Mark.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition is signed by residents in my riding and adjacent ridings. It’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care should recognize the importance of rural health care in Ontario; and

“Whereas the Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network commissioned a report by the Hay Group that recommends downgrading the emergency room at the Charlotte Eleanor Englehart (CEE) Hospital in Petrolia to an urgent-care ward; and

“Whereas, if accepted, that recommendation would increase the demand on emergency room services in Sarnia; and ...

“Whereas the Petrolia medical community has stated that the loss of the Petrolia emergency room will result in the loss of many of our local doctors; and

“Whereas Petrolia’s retirement and nursing home communities are also dependent on” this hospital;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to urge the Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network to completely reject the report of the Hay Group and leave the emergency room designation at Charlotte Eleanor Englehart Hospital in Petrolia.”

I agree with this petition and affix my signature and send it with Noel.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time available for petitions.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

REGULATED HEALTH PROFESSIONS AMENDMENT ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PROFESSIONS DE LA SANTÉ RÉGLEMENTÉES

Mr. McMeekin, on behalf of Mr. Caplan, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 141, An Act to amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 141, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Debate?

Someone has to lead off from the government side. I recognize the Minister of Government Services.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I’m sharing my time with the member from Scarborough–Rouge River, and I’ll sit down. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I stand before the Legislature today to speak to the proposed amendments to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, or the RHPA.

Above all else, this amendment is about arming our health care professionals with the tools they need to further Ontario's patient safety agenda. If passed, this amendment will strengthen the safety and quality of care provided by all regulated health professions in this province. It would provide all health regulatory colleges with the tools they need to support their mandate.

Some background on how this proposed amendment came about will help explain why we've moved to amend this legislation. In Ontario, health professions are regulated by their own governing bodies or colleges. These colleges set the standards for the skills, knowledge and behaviour of their members. Doctors are regulated by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, or the CPSO. Currently, regulatory colleges like the CPSO have the authority, under the RHPA, to make regulations regarding the inspection of equipment, accounts, records and reports and facilities where their members practise, but they do not have the authority to observe their members directly while they are practising during these facility inspections.

All the members of this Legislature will recall the tragic case of a patient who died after undergoing cosmetic-type surgical procedures from a family physician who was not a certified plastic surgeon, but who held him- or herself out to the public as a cosmetic surgeon.

In an unrelated case, about a year later, the CPSO heard a complaint against a family physician who was performing cosmetic surgery, including liposuction and breast augmentation, under anaesthesia and without formal surgical training. At his hearing, the CPSO decided this doctor's practice would be subjected to unannounced inspections and he would be required to take a physician's review course.

Cases like these showed that substandard care provided by physicians has prompted the CPSO to request legislation that will provide greater protection to the public in high-risk procedures such as cosmetic surgery. The facilities that provide these services are not otherwise governed by existing legislation like the Public Hospitals Act or the Independent Health Facilities Act. In some circumstances, the safety of a facility and its equipment can only be determined by directly observing the work being done and the equipment in use. That's why the CPSO felt it was essential for it to have the authority to inspect facilities which provide surgery and anaesthesia in addition to being able to review the accounts, equipment and records of these facilities. Our government agreed that protecting the public was paramount. This has led us here to the introduction of an amendment to the RHPA.

You'll recall that Bill 141 was introduced on December 10, 2008. It proposed providing health regu-

latory colleges with the authority to make regulations that would allow them to directly observe their members in practice during facility inspections. On March 3, 2009, at the Standing Committee on Social Policy, the CPSO supported the bill, but the CPSO also recommended that, in order to better protect the public, the RHPA needed to be amended further to require members who were under investigation by the college to co-operate with the college investigator. On March 10, at the Standing Committee on Social Policy clause-by-clause review, the official opposition introduced a motion to amend the bill to the effect that the college investigators may make reasonable inquiries of any person, including members under investigation, and that members under investigation must co-operate fully with the investigators. This motion was adopted by the committee, and I would like to thank my colleagues from the Conservatives and the NDP, Ms. Witmer and Ms. Gélinas, for their co-operation in seeing that this bill went through committee in a speedy process.

So what does this bill under debate today do? It strengthens and supports our government's commitment to improved patient safety and quality of health care. It addresses all the gaps in the RHPA identified by the CPSO, gaps which limited the ability of all regulatory colleges to investigate unsafe practitioners and inspect the places where they practise, and affirms the previous decisions made by the Ontario courts. I'd like to acknowledge and thank our partner, the CPSO, for its leadership and commitment to improving patient safety.

This is but the latest in a series of initiatives by the McGuinty government designed to protect Ontario patients. Our government is turning expert advice into action. We now publicly report on eight patient safety indicators, including C. difficile, as part of a comprehensive plan to create an unprecedented level of transparency in our Ontario hospitals. Our government knows that when you track it, you can improve it. It's the same principle we used to lower our wait times. Last December, we began publicly reporting MRSA, VRE and HSMR rates, establishing Ontario as an international leader in patient safety. We will begin publicly reporting four additional patient safety indicators by April of this year.

1600

We are supporting front-line health care workers to help prevent the spread of infectious diseases. We created an award-winning provincial hand hygiene program because we know that the best way to prevent the spread of infection is by handwashing.

We created infection control resource teams. We funded 166 infection prevention and control practitioners in our hospitals across the province, and we support more effective antibiotic usage.

This legislation, if passed, is another step in our government's aggressive patient agenda. It is ultimately about arming our health care professionals with the tools they need to continue to deliver quality care in a very safe environment.

I urge all members of the Legislature to support this bill. Supporting this bill will help our province's health professionals' regulatory colleges in their continued effort to protect the public. We are proposing to amend the RHPA, the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991. That's why we're giving the colleges the power they need to do a better job.

I hope everyone supports this bill and allows it easy and quick passage so we can bring it into law.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's always a pleasure for me to listen to the member from Scarborough-Rouge River and have the opportunity—when you follow his career, he was a very distinguished councillor in the old city of Scarborough. Then he took his interests to the newly amalgamated council in Toronto. If you look at his work, he was always interested in health care activities. I'm pleased that he's currently the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Indeed, he's been very involved in this bill, the health regulations act, to make sure that a number of our regulated health professions will now come under this new act.

It's something that I think will be supported by all corners of this House. We know that patient safety is paramount for us all, on all sides of this House, to make sure that when patients enter our 159 hospitals in Ontario, they have the opportunity to receive first-class care. This can be done. We enhance that care by making provisions under Bill 141 to make sure they get speedy passage in this House.

We know that C. difficile is something that's been reported on extensively in the media and we have a comprehensive plan, of course, to report it and to make sure that all our communities are well aware of activities that go on in the 159 publicly funded hospitals in the province of Ontario.

I do commend the member from Scarborough-Rouge River. He's been particularly active on this file. He will shepherd this piece of legislation, Bill 141, through the House. I know that, as he speaks throughout the GTA on this issue, he's a person that we all listen to very carefully, and he will continue to show leadership on this issue and many other issues in this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to both the Minister of Government Services and the member from Scarborough-Rouge River.

I must say to the Minister of Government Services that it was one of his finest speeches, and also one of his shortest ones. I was wondering what he was possibly going to contribute to this debate, and his contribution, of course, was to introduce his colleague and friend the member from Scarborough-Rouge River. So, yes, I commend him for the way he did it.

I think the member from Scarborough-Rouge River did indeed do a good job. He did present the government's position here. I think this perhaps will not be a

long debate, because my understanding is that members of all parties recognize the significance of the debate and the bill, the compromises that have been made by the government, opposition members, the colleges and everyone else who has been involved in it.

I just want to say to my colleague the member from Scarborough-Rouge River that I listened intently as well to my colleague from Peterborough, who talked about the debater's long interest in health care, even from the time of municipal days. I used to sit right next door, right next to the member from Scarborough-Rouge River, and I don't remember him talking about issues like that at Metro Hall. So I don't know where the member from Peterborough got this information, but perhaps he would convey it a little later or perhaps in the rebuttal my friend from Scarborough-Rouge River will stand and up and tell us how long he has had this interest. I know he has certainly had the interest since he has come to this Legislature and has become the parliamentary assistant responsible for this particular bill. But in the truth of the Legislature, I think we need to know this very important information.

So my comment is in fact a question for the member from Scarborough-Rouge River to outline his past and previous experience, particularly in municipal government, around this issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It's a pleasure to have a moment to say a few words on the bill before us, Bill 141, which is basically an amendment about arming our health care professionals with the tools they need to further Ontario's patient safety agenda.

I too had the opportunity to listen to the previous speakers. I know that we are basically in agreement on most of the items that have been put forward and that are going to be, hopefully, passed into law very soon.

I do know, though, that in my riding and in the riding of my colleague the member from Scarborough-Rouge River, we have a lot of new Canadians who come into Scarborough and oftentimes they may not know what the rules are in this country. I think what we're doing here is ensuring that those who are permitted to do work—let's say they're plastic surgeons or they work in a particular medical area—are properly regulated and that they can't get away with doing something they're not allowed to do. It's easy sometimes to try to fool someone or to try to say, "I'm a doctor." They may be a doctor, but they may not have a doctor's licence. There's quite a large difference.

We did the same thing with paralegals in Ontario a while back when we put in some regulations requiring them to be regulated because of the fact that some people were complaining about their services and weren't sure whether or not paralegals were authorized to do certain legal work, and also to have them disciplined, if need be.

It's an important amendment, and I think it's an important thing to do. Hopefully, it will help people, in both of our ridings and in all parts of Ontario. So I'm in support of it today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to also follow in my colleague's steps. It's nice in the House when we can find out little tidbits about our fellow members that we weren't aware of. I appreciate the members from Peterborough and Rouge River for their indulgence. I'd also like to express my thanks for their experience in the medical field. I wasn't aware that they were so well informed, but I will keep that in mind when I have any medical questions in the future.

But in reference to the bill, I hate to once again ruin the party, but we'll be talking extensively on the bill. Of course, we will be supporting it, but we have some concerns. Like the good New Democrats that we are, we always try to look really deeply into these types of things, and we'll be coming up with some more questions for our friends across the road. I'm sure that, in their infinite wisdom, they will deal with it in committee someday—I hope. I know it's third reading now, but when we get our points across, I'd like to at least deal with them in committee. We don't get a chance to do that very often around here. So I'm hoping that any future medical bills they bring forward we'll be able to discuss in committee, to further our joint knowledge in the medical field.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. The member for Scarborough–Rouge River has two minutes to respond.

1610

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I just want to thank my colleagues from Peterborough, Beaches–East York, Scarborough Southwest and Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for their comments.

Let me just clarify for my friend from Beaches–East York, whom I sat next to at the amalgamated city for five years, I believe. I've been in municipal politics for 17 years, and I spent 12 of those looking after the city's budgets. I can tell you, in dealing with a city budget, you deal extensively with public health and the medical officer. Beyond that, I spent five years as the chair of the audit committee of the amalgamated city—and I know everybody here knows my work on that—and we had many, many audits of the health department at the city. So I have a little bit of knowledge. I've been in the Ministry of Health for over a year now, and this, I believe, is the third bill at the Legislature that I've dealt with.

The government is bringing this bill forward because our main interest is patient safety. As a result of incidents in 2007, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario approached the government to see if we could strengthen legislation to give them additional powers to make sure that patients are protected when they use our health care facilities and when they use private physician facilities. Therefore, we brought forward this legislation in support of the college so that they could do a better job.

Again, I want to say to my colleagues in the Conservative Party and the NDP—Mrs. Witmer and Ms.

Gélinas, whom I worked with—thanks for their support in seeing that the piece of legislation got through committee very quickly. I hope it gets through this process very quickly and becomes law.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm very happy to rise today on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party to respond at this third reading to the legislation entitled the Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act, 2008.

If this bill is passed, which I certainly assume it will be, given that there was all-party support, it will give Ontario's 23 health regulatory colleges new powers to conduct inspections in settings that are today unregulated. These changes would allow a college, such as the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, to directly observe a health professional's practice and watch a medical procedure being performed.

When this legislation was introduced last year, I indicated that this bill was an important first step in improving patient safety. Although this was a good bill when it was first introduced, it is now a much better bill as a result of consultation and public hearings. I believe that this legislation today is a prime example of how legislation can be improved when there is consultation with the public and with stakeholders. This is the result we have.

I want to thank everybody who has contributed to the process, including all of my colleagues in the Legislature, Mr. Balkissoon and his team, certainly Ms. Gélinas, the staff from the Ministry of Health, the colleges, the health care professionals who were here representing their professions, and of course the public who participated.

I want to just outline briefly how this legislation came about. Part of it is the result of a Toronto Star investigation over the past two years that documented “a regulatory black hole” surrounding Ontario's growing cosmetic surgery industry.

In September 2007, Krista Stryland, a Toronto real estate agent and a 32-year-old mother, walked into her doctor's office to undergo a very routine liposuction treatment. Tragically, she never came out. She died of cardiac arrest. According to court documents, Ms. Stryland had 23 incisions made in six body parts during one surgical session.

Sadly, this case is but one of several high-profile deaths which put a spotlight on cosmetic surgery. For example, in 2004, we had TV producer Micheline Charest die after undergoing a facelift and breast augmentation. In 2007, Olivia Goldsmith, author of the book *The First Wives Club*, also died while undergoing cosmetic surgery. And the list goes on.

While some Canadian provinces, notably Alberta and British Columbia, strictly regulate those who perform cosmetic surgery, Ontario has been somewhat slower to do so. In both of the western provinces, all surgeons and the surgical facilities must be licensed for each procedure they perform. As well, physicians in these provinces cannot advertise themselves as cosmetic surgeons without holding a surgical specialty.

In 2008, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario proposed regulatory changes that would prevent doctors here in Ontario from calling themselves cosmetic surgeons, a term applied to doctors who are not plastic surgeons and who perform procedures including facelifts, tummy tucks and liposuction.

According to the college's website, the college, "since April 2007 ... has undertaken a number of initiatives, in addition to the proposed regulations on out-of-hospital facilities and use of specialist titles that are intended to improve patient safety." These changes include: (1) passing a policy which requires doctors to report changes in their scope of practice; (2) producing an information fact sheet to provide to Ontarians with important information they should consider before deciding to have cosmetic procedures; and (3) asking all physicians who perform cosmetic procedures to give the CPSO information about their practice and their training to ensure that doctors are only practising in areas where they have the necessary knowledge, skill and training.

In September 2008, Ontario's Supreme Court ruled that the CPSO has the authority to force a health professional to submit to an interview and an observation by an investigator. A *Globe and Mail* article published on September 29 of that year states the court's decision "will push forward the stalled CPSO investigations of a handful of doctors, launched after" the death of Ms. Stryland. "With hundreds of family doctors performing cosmetic surgery in Ontario, the court's decision has set an important precedent..."

When this legislation was introduced, colleges like the CPSO had the following to say:

"Bill 141 is a good first step to improving patient safety at out-of-hospital facilities. However, ensuring the safety of patients in all settings across Ontario is of greater concern. This will require legislative amendments that will explicitly codify a college's investigatory powers to ensure that physicians are meeting expected standards of practice.

"Full patient safety requires that a good facilities inspection system be complemented by an effective investigation system to provide adequate oversight of the health professionals that work in health care facilities.

"These amendments are needed because the colleges are currently involved in litigation regarding the extent of their investigators' powers under the HPPC (i.e., requiring interviews and observing performance of procedures). The final outcome of this litigation will likely not be known for many months, if not years.

"While these legal challenges are contested at various levels of the court, the tenor of the investigation's process is changing and some regulated health care professionals are taking a more adversarial stance. Colleges are facing difficulties in some serious investigations and this could compromise patient safety."

That brings us to where we are today.

Again, I want to commend the college for their continued and ongoing efforts to put Ontarians first and to protect patient safety.

1620

When this legislation was introduced last year, I indicated our party's interest in hearing the colleges' and the public's response. Of course, this bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy after second reading, and there were several points that were submitted in the form of written or oral submissions during committee.

Among the written submissions there was one from the College of Nurses. The CNO "does anticipate that this amendment, if enacted, may be a valuable regulatory tool for CNO in its investigative and quality assurance functions in the future.... In order to optimize the ability of colleges to draft enforceable regulations under this amendment, CNO suggests its amendment, to clarify beyond challenge, the investigatory powers that colleges possess in order to fully take advantage of the changes introduced by Bill 141."

The RNAO urges the immediate adoption of measures that would increase public safety. They said this is an issue for women's health and safety.

"In the interest of public safety, accountability and transparency, the RNAO welcomes this amendment that will provide for the direct observation of a member in practice."

However, the one group that obviously was the most interested in Bill 141 was the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario because, as I just indicated, many of their very important investigations had been put on hold due to the legal challenges to the college's investigatory powers. These included investigations into general practitioners who were performing invasive cosmetic surgical procedures—investigations that had arisen after patients had died. The powers being challenged were the college's powers to interview and observe physicians during investigations.

During committee proceedings, the college indicated that while these issues are before the court, it is possible for physicians who are involved in this litigation to continue practising surgery. The college indicated this could be a significant risk to the public. During the committee proceedings, the college requested that their powers of investigation be clarified. They requested that Bill 141 be amended to include HPPC amendments to codify the investigation powers of health colleges to ensure public safety. This is what the college said: "Interviews are an essential tool that must be made available to investigators to conduct a meaningful investigation. Interviews are a usual and accepted manner of evaluating medical knowledge and judgment. The medical chart tells only one part of the story; the remainder needs to come from explanations from the health care provider. Whether care is simply poorly charted or is in fact poorly provided can often be told from an interview."

In preparation for the committee hearing, the college researched the powers of investigation that were available to other regulators in Canada and Ontario, and they brought forward the example of the Ontario Veterinarians Act, which requires veterinarians to participate in

interviews with their college's investigators. They also took a look to see what else was out there. They requested that there be clarification regarding the power to observe its members.

According to the college, an example of when observation may be necessary includes cosmetic surgery performed by a general practitioner who has not undertaken a formal surgical residency program. The college then said:

"In certain limited cases, a college investigator will need to observe a member perform a procedure or technique.

"As surgery is a manual discipline, direct observation of the manual skills of the physician is important in order to thoroughly assess or examine the physician's surgical practice.

"A medical investigator will often be unable to draw any meaningful conclusion unless he/she is able to observe the member perform the procedure. It is through direct observation that an investigator can best assess the level of skill, knowledge and judgment of a surgeon."

So, we listened to what the college had to say. We all understood, all three parties, that there was a need to make a very substantial amendment to the legislation. Both my colleague from Nickel Belt and I put forward basically the same substantial amendment in order to codify the observation and investigation powers of Ontario's 23 health colleges. I'm pleased to report that that amendment received all-party support.

I want to add my sincere appreciation to all of the participants in all three parties. I think that this committee was first and foremost concerned about the safety and lives of people in the province of Ontario. I believe that the amendment that was added to the legislation did and will further protect the health and safety of people in this province. I think that as a result of taking the time to listen to the colleges and listen to the public, and agreeing that there was a need for improvement, this bill today will save lives in the future. I thank those who participated.

I now encourage the government to move very swiftly to enact this legislation. Once this legislation has received royal assent, Ontario's regulatory colleges can begin to implement regulations which define their powers of investigation. Obviously, that's going to be critically important as we move forward.

Thank you to everyone who had a part in making sure that this legislation could be the best possible to protect the lives of people in the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: The member from—Kitchener–Waterloo?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Righto.

Mr. Michael Prue: Righto. The member from Kitchener–Waterloo always speaks quite eloquently on matters, particularly matters involving medicine and medical professions and health. I guess that's from her long experience, and her experience sitting on the other

side of the House and as the minister. It's always a pleasure to listen to what she has to say, in a sane and balanced way. I think that today she said the same.

I want to commend her for the process that she went through, as well as my colleague France Gélinas, who unfortunately is not able to be here today, for the input they have had in order to come to an all-party resolution.

It is wonderful, to me. This is one of the rare, wonderful occasions when all three parties can come together on a consensus, when they can listen rationally to the amendments that are put forward both by government and by opposition members and come to a conclusion that is of great benefit. This is one of those rare bills—and I've been here now seven and a half years—that seems to come together. I wish that we could bring more bills together in such a fashion, and I wish that we could have more collegial discussions like we're having here today, where all parties come to a realization that what happens in this place matters a great deal to the people of this province and a great deal to the college and to the people who have fought so long and so hard to get proper regulations around this industry.

Again, I commend the member from Kitchener–Waterloo for the part she had to play, and I commend as well all the members of this House, on the committee and those who are here today, for giving this bill an opportunity, and giving an opportunity for everyone to be heard, both in committee and here today, so that we can come to a bill that will have unanimous approval of the House and for the people across this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I, too, am pleased to rise today to make a few comments with regard to the debate that was added to here by the member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

I agree with her, as do I agree with the member for Beaches–East York, that this is a pleasure, that the committee—the opposition and the government members of that committee—were able to work together to produce what will be, I think, a good and effective piece of legislation. It's kind of interesting that we, as a government, do get criticized often for not accepting opposition amendments. I, too, have been around here for a few years—through three governments, actually—and that seems to be a fault that many governments have been criticized for, that they don't listen to some good amendments in the opposition. It's a pleasure that we've done so this time. It's also interesting to me that, one by one, we all seem to agree that that's the way this place should function, and yet when we get together collectively, we don't seem to quite be able to work it out that way.

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Certainly, this piece of legislation is one that protects the health and the health care of the residents of the province of Ontario. For that reason alone, it's a good piece of legislation and a timely one.

It would seem that we have to have these regulations in place from time to time, notwithstanding the fact that

we talk about red tape and being overregulated. There are certain areas where government has a place to make regulations and to see that those regulations are carried out so that the benefit is accrued to all the residents of the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim Wilson: It's also my pleasure to join with colleagues from all sides of the House in, first of all, congratulating the College of Physicians and Surgeons for coming forward with this important piece of legislation, and the government for adopting the legislation and sending it to committee.

I want to thank our colleague from Kitchener-Waterloo for her tremendous contribution. She was an excellent health minister—which the government of the day doesn't often acknowledge when Mrs. Witmer gets up to ask questions or make comments—for this province and did us all proud in terms of improving the health care system.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Compared to some other ones, eh?

Mr. Jim Wilson: She was my successor, I say to the member for Essex, and she did a far better job than I would ever do.

She was also Deputy Premier during those years and represented us very, very well—many times, a very non-partisan role—in terms of getting out to the people of Ontario. I remember her coming to my riding as education minister and visiting schools, and she was very well received.

Now she's doing a great job as health critic and deputy leader of Her Majesty's official opposition.

Again, congratulations to all in terms of bringing this particular law up to standard to improve the standards and enforcement abilities.

Mrs. Witmer, of course, had a wonderful amendment that was absolutely crucial. It's one of the questions that's before the courts with respect to the regulatory colleges, in particular the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and that was to codify the observational and investigative powers of the regulatory colleges.

Of course, what we're referring to here, mainly what made it in the media, are the cosmetic surgery incidents that did result in the death, I remember, of Krista Stryland, who was only 32 years old. She died after undergoing cosmetic surgery.

Congratulations to all. It's nice that we could work together on this one.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I would like to thank the member from Kitchener-Waterloo for her insightful comments on a subject she knows a great deal about.

I just want to remind people out there that the reason why this bill, Bill 141, is being introduced is because, as the member from Simcoe-Grey, the former Minister of Health himself, said, there was a series of very unfortunate incidents that occurred as a result of cosmetic

surgeries. One in particular that he mentioned ended up in a young woman dying. That's because there wasn't the ability for the College of Physicians and Surgeons to have that oversight over their professional members. The college has asked for this oversight so they can ensure that the doctors who are performing this very, very complex surgery can be overseen and can ensure they have the qualifications to undertake these sophisticated operations.

Sometimes we forget—I'm sure the two members opposite, being former Ministers of Health, know full well—the incredible scale and scope of medical procedures that are taking place across this province. I think it's 400 hospitals, 24/7 they're operating around the clock in every corner of this province, and so many medical doctors and nurse practitioners and, you know, the surgeries that are taking place as we speak just down the street here on University Avenue. We expect, as the public, that these doctors will be qualified and the procedures will be followed properly.

Thankfully, we have the College of Physicians and Surgeons; we have the Regulated Health Professions Act, where there is oversight. It's something that we really sometimes take for granted, but thankfully over the years this kind of oversight has been built up in Ontario's health system, and I think it really offers protection for many patients who are in critical need of medical procedures.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I'll return to the deputy leader of the official opposition to reply.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I want to thank the member from Eglinton. The member is right. There are, on a daily basis, obviously many surgeries occurring in province of Ontario, and the ones that we're talking about are usually done out of the hospital and oftentimes by individuals who haven't been totally qualified. So, as a result of this, we do hope that individuals in this province who are undergoing these procedures will now have the protection that they deserve, and these expanded powers should allow for that to happen.

I want to thank the member from Simcoe-Grey. Despite what he might have said, he was the Minister of Health before me, and I can assure you he left me some very big shoes to fill, and he's been great in helping with this health file throughout our years in opposition—which I hope and I know are going to come to an end in 2011.

I want to thank the member from Beaches-East York, again, a very respected colleague, a person who has made a great contribution in this House since his arrival; and, of course, my friend from Essex. I always appreciate his kind comments and the participation and support he offers to members in this House, as well as his leadership.

I'm just grateful that all three parties came together, recognized the need to protect the public, as our 23 colleges have an obligation to do, and that we have hopefully been able to put forward a bill that will quickly

be passed in order that the public can be well protected in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: I seek unanimous consent to hold down the lead. My colleague France Gélinas, the member from Nickel Belt, has been called out of town to a funeral. May we have that consent?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to stand down the leadoff speech for the New Democrats. Agreed? Agreed.

I'll return to the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I rise to talk about Bill 141. Bill 141 tells us something about how legislation and government responses to stakeholder-identified changes should and can work. In the case of Bill 141, we have an example of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario responding to an issue that affects their members as well as the well-being of Ontarians. The college knows their profession best; they understand what needs to be done in order to move with the changes in the profession and to serve its members and patients the best way they can. Bill 141 is a product of co-operation and listening to those who know the issue best. The New Democrats have been happy to support Bill 141. We understand that it is an important step forward to ensure patient safety in our province.

However, we are saddened that the co-operation and listening that took place in Ontario needs a place to turn when something goes wrong. We need a neutral third party oversight. The existing Ombudsman can take on this role; in fact, his office is already receiving some complaints of services and facilities. He does not have jurisdiction over that. How hard would it be for the government to have listened to the Ombudsman to make the stakeholders who have been calling for this for years—New Democrats have introduced multiple private members' bills that would have provided the necessary oversight, yet the government does not want to move in that direction.

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Home care: Ontario's home care system is, unfortunately, another example of too little done to protect the safety and well-being of those who rely on the health care service. Last winter, there was some reason to think that the missteps into a privatized, competitive bidding model of home care were ending. After months of vocal protests by angry Hamilton residents, furious that the two non-profit home care providers with a lengthy history of servicing our community were driven out of business by the competitive bidding process, the now former Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, George Smitherman, put a temporary end to the competitive bidding, and we were happy about that.

Here, stakeholders and experts in the field were speaking out and telling the government that change had to happen. These experts know that competitive bidding

disrupts the continuity of care for patients and creates a work environment of low wages and no job security for caregivers. It is a system that pads the pockets of for-profit private companies, while robbing our most vulnerable community members of the care they desperately need.

We see today, as Red Cross home care workers hit the picket line in Sudbury, where this system of competitive bidding leads. The 3,000 Red Cross workers do not want to strike; they would rather be providing for their clients. However, they have no choice. Their situation is a result of a broken system, one that prioritizes profit over quality; a system which allows a home care worker to work a 10-hour day but only be paid for seven hours—the other three hours are travel time and therefore unpaid; a system which places home care workers in a state of precarious and underpaid employment; a system which functions only through the exploitation of its workers and which leaves clients sorely underserved.

Yet in spite of all the evidence and outcry against a for-profit competitive bidding model for home care, the McGuinty government quietly announced the renewal of this inherently flawed process in December of last year. We know that the competitive bidding model has decimated not-for-profit home care providers. It has compromised the quality of care provided to Ontarians and seriously undervalued and undercompensated those dedicated to providing home care.

For-profit home care services divert public dollars away from patient care and into the pockets of for-profit companies. On the other hand, we know that home care services help keep people independent longer, they are an economical way of keeping our seniors healthier and they reduce the need for more expensive health care services. If the government wants a reliable home care system, one that is capable of providing for our most vulnerable, the province could have had the courage to listen to those who know the situation best and put an end to competitive bidding once and for all.

Delisting medicare services: In the last five years, we have watched vital health care services become delisted. This includes chiropractic services, optometry and physiotherapy. Health care professionals know that in the long run, inadequate access to those services will result in a much higher cost to the health care system. It simply makes no sense to force Ontarians to pay for these important health care services out of their own pockets.

An example: Think of an elderly person; let's call her Maureen. Maureen falls and breaks her hip. She receives an operation that is successful and after surgery is told that physiotherapy is required. Now that the physio has been delisted, the only place to get access covered by OHIP is in the hospital. The hospital waiting list is 400 people long—not uncommon in Ontario. Maureen faces the choice of paying out of her pocket if she is able to—break into her limited savings—or wait for months for treatment. Unable to pay out of her pocket, Maureen must wait to receive the physiotherapy from her doctor which he ordered. By the time Maureen is seen by her

local physiotherapist, she has been living with acute pain for months and will now require extensive rehabilitation rather than straightforward physiotherapy. In this scenario, Maureen is lucky: She does not fall again or get readmitted to the hospital; she does not become a casualty of the bare-bones health care system.

Delisting services does not save money; it shifts the burden to the individual, and it shifts the burden to other parts of the health care system. Experts know that the last round of delisting resulted in more visits to doctors and hospitals. Delisting fails our public health care system, and it risks costing all of us more, as people end up in acute situations because they cannot access the preventive or appropriate care they need.

It seems that the government may be headed down this path again; we hope not in Hamilton, because we already put 1,500 people into a banquet centre. Mr. Smitherman sought to change that and reverse that decision at the time. We hope we're not headed down that way again, because the people of Hamilton once again will come out in force against this.

Last week, when asked about the potential of delisting, Minister Caplan could not reassure Ontarians that this was not on the agenda for the budget. In the first couple of months of 2009, more than 100,000 Ontarians lost their jobs. These people and their families are hurting. They are relying on the social safety net to be there for them in these times that are troubling. Instead of this government destabilizing the pillars of our system, has the government not learned from its past mistakes? Will it continue, unwisely, actions which destabilize our universal quality of health care? I hope not.

Long-term-care and retirement homes: Long-term-care and retirement homes desperately need facilities for our rapidly aging population, and they have fared no better under the McGuinty government. Ontarians have watched as the contracts for long-term-care facilities are handed to private corporations.

If the communities of Kingston, Windsor and Guelph are any lesson, it is that these profit-driven companies are not willing to risk their bottom line to provide the services Ontarians need. It was from these communities that a private company withdrew when the economic situation took a turn for the worse, and what will happen to these beds now? Our LTC facilities are suffering because of the lack of investment.

Although 3.5 hours of daily care is set as a minimum requirement for adequate care, the government is still falling short of meeting the desired number of hours, and without the needed investments in new staff, nurses and personal support workers, any improvement to these facilities will come up against an obvious ceiling.

Retirement homes have become a crutch for the easing of the crisis of alternative level of care—ALC—patients who now occupy approximately 20% of our province's hospital beds. As patients, many of these seniors who end up in hospital cannot return home but do not have an acute health care need. Many of these people are finding themselves in retirement homes.

Although many of the Ontario retirement homes are excellent facilities, the problem remains that retirement homes are not regulated health facilities. They are a residential accommodation that lacks regulation and obligations to provide a minimum level of health support. The government has been urged by many stakeholders, the New Democrats and health care workers to regulate these retirement homes in order to protect the safety of patients and the elderly in our province. Regulation is needed in order to ensure that seniors do not become a casualty of a system that cannot properly provide for them. Regulation is needed to ensure that the care needed is received.

Nurses: I can safely say that my family is trying to add to the system a little bit. My youngest daughter is taking her nursing, and now she's going to move on to be a nurse practitioner, so hopefully she can help some of the people of our province.

Nurses are the backbone of our health care system. They are the only 24/7 bedside professionals in our hospitals. It is nurses who work tirelessly, day in and day out, on the front lines, providing the best quality of care to our Ontario families.

The McGuinty government promised to hire 9,000 more nurses and 2,500 personal support workers. These promised workers were supposed to work in our province's LTC facilities and other health facilities now feeling the crunch because of staffing shortages. Yet, in the latest fall economic statement, the health minister said that the promise would have to wait a little, that this promise was going to be postponed, and no firm date has been given about when we may see it fulfilled. Minister Caplan has hinted that this promise would sit on the shelf until after the next election in 2012 or 2013.

Our province has learned the hard way that when you cut nurses and nursing hours, patient care suffers. New Democrats know that even in hard economic times, balancing hospital budgets cannot be made on the backs of nurses. We are calling on the government yet again to listen to what those who know best are saying: to follow through on their promise to hire the 9,000 nurses.

Dental care: The McGuinty government promised to spend \$135 million over three years to create a dental care system for low-income Ontarians. To date, only \$10 million of this has been spent to expand an already existing program. This government has had no problem patting themselves on the back for making the original promise, but the government seems to think that they have no obligation to follow through on the promises they made.

Experts like the Ontario Dental Association and the Association of Ontario Health Centres have repeatedly urged the government to implement a preventive dental program that will serve not only the most acute cases but also prevent the tragedy of poor dental health to happen in the first place.

An average of 30,000 Ontarians are facing job losses each month, and for many of these people this also means the loss of their benefits. Dental costs are high and

become hard to justify when you have to make a choice between your teeth and feeding your children. Is this the kind of choice that the government wants Ontarians to make? Will the government be listening to the stakeholders any time soon and follow through on their promise to the dental system that will serve low-income Ontarians?

In conclusion, we see that there is unfortunately a very long list of actions this government has taken that are counter to the best interests of Ontario's patients, a health care system that leaves people vulnerable. We see that the McGuinty government rarely acts in the best interests of the patients or takes action on the recommendations offered by the experts in the various health fields. We see that the success of Bill 141 is more of an exception rather than a rule; that is, the government could learn a lot from the process of this bill and apply it to other realms of the health care system. If the McGuinty government had the good sense of bringing Bill 141 forward, then they can also bring forward the necessary changes to the Ombuds-

man oversight, home care, delisting medical services, long-term-care and retirement homes, nursing staff, and to the dental care program.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments? Seeing none, further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: I move the adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? The debate is adjourned.

Third reading debate adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Orders of the day.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow, March 25, at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1652.

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Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
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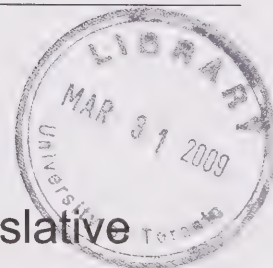
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Wednesday 25 March 2009

Mercredi 25 mars 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
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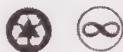
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 25 March 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 25 mars 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the Islamic prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT (KEEPING OUR KIDS SAFE AT SCHOOL), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION (SÉCURITÉ DE NOS ENFANTS À L'ÉCOLE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 23, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 157, An Act to amend the Education Act/ Projet de loi 157, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: I rise today to discuss Bill 157, An Act to amend the Education Act. As New Democrats said when this bill was introduced, we will be supporting this bill. The issue of safety in our schools is one that my colleagues and I have raised in the Legislature, and as such we will support this bill, but we also have a number of comments of constructive criticism on this very serious issue. We also want to recognize the commitment to this issue by MPP Joyce Savoline in ensuring that the Liberal government could not ignore this issue.

Broader issues impacting violence in schools and youth violence: Our students must be able to attend school without fear. The goal of our schools is to provide a place of learning and growth, an environment that nurtures creativity and critical thinking, to teach skills and knowledge that equip these young people for future possibilities. The practical reality of schools in Ontario is that the Harris era cuts have not been addressed in the past six years. Teachers and education workers are stretched so thin that it is difficult for them to engage with students in the school environment in the way that is needed and that they desire. Support staff in schools have been slashed. Necessary after-school programs are limited. Ontario's schools are divided into haves and have-nots according to the ability of the parents and school committees to fundraise. In a broader context, we see challenges of poverty, recent job loss, and disenfranch-

isement of racialized and immigrant communities, just to name a few of the factors.

What does all this have to do with safety in schools and mandatory reporting? Well, as the Falconer report on the roots of youth violence and even the safe schools workgroup tell us to varying degrees, violence in schools, individual incidents, a culture of silence or simply the inability for staff to be present as necessary due to the unrealistic demands on their time are an accumulation of a variety of factors that need to be addressed. I wanted to ensure that we do not lose sight of what is required across the board to address what is at the heart of keeping our kids safe in schools. This safety, we see, is so intrinsically linked to broader social issues and access to services.

Reporting: This bill requires mandatory reporting on many levels by teachers who see activities which may warrant suspension. They must report to a principal. The principal, in turn, must make a judgment call to inform parents of the affected party and to contact those of the perpetrating party. This reporting, and the duties and powers related, extending to other workers who are not necessarily employed by the board but do interact with students raises some questions. Does this include cafeteria workers, social service workers and police officers in schools? Do these individuals have correct training that would allow them to have the confidence necessary to take on this role?

Defining terms of the legislation: Parents have a right to know what is happening to their kids, particularly when there are incidents that require their attention. We know that we can't call parents for every single conflict that a child is involved in. Teachers cannot do that. The system would crawl to a halt if every incident had to be reported and would not be logical. There are serious incidents where calling parents is automatic and necessary. What we will need is a way to judge all the incidents that are between. Those incidents are not easily defined. Educators need a direction to help determine what needs to be reported and what does not. We will support anything that will assist educators to protect our children and keep our parents informed.

Much will depend on the definition of "reportable incident." Teachers are already required, as the minister said, to report suspected cases of child abuse to the principal, who then has the responsibility to report externally. In situations of violent incidents among students, the practice is for teachers to report to the principal. The legislation clarifies that responsibility.

In the experience of our member from Toronto as a former teacher and as a critic for a long time, teachers do

report violent problems when they happen. It is in their interest to do so—to protect themselves, if nothing else, and to protect those young people. So reporting happens. Whether or not there's support at the higher levels is sometimes another question, but even then the principals of course have a lot to do, and they have to use their judgment and time wisely. In some cases, they may fail in their judgment in that regard, but in his experience most teachers have done the job of reporting, but this also codifies it, helps them and lets them do it.

Teachers have been silenced. Moreover, we find that teachers do report incidents from across the spectrum. They take them to their principals, to their higher-ups, and what they find is that their reports are dismissed and they are silenced, and that, above all, no school wants a bad reputation. No school wants to be known as the one with the problems. No school wants to be pinned with a stigma of overwhelming disciplinary problems. For one reason or another, principals are scared to acknowledge some of these incidents. Principals are also under considerable pressure to reduce the number of suspensions, so that government will be perceived as doing something about school violence.

But what we're talking about here is suspendable offences. Are our school administrators ready to deal with that, and how? It would do us all well to have another look at this TDSB report on safety in schools, the Falconer report, and read closely about the culture of silence developing in schools across this province. That is one of the biggest, if not the biggest, obstacles to safety in our schools.

Issues mandatory reporting does not deal with: I do want to say that mandatory reporting doesn't deal with the issues that we should be talking about. Mandatory reporting doesn't deal with issues of mental illness. Mandatory reporting doesn't deal with kids who come to school where in their family there's substance or alcohol abuse. Many of these issues at home bring violence to the school. Some of these students are possibly sexually abused or emotionally abused, and these kids act out violently at school as a result. Mandatory reporting doesn't deal with that. The Liberals and Tories might say, "That's not what they're supposed to be doing," but we should be talking about what we should be doing to prevent problems before we're in a situation where teachers are forced to report violent or difficult problems. Reporting is good, but it doesn't address the causes of youth violence.

How do we effectively deal with youth violence? Dealing with youth violence requires more than accurate reporting and putting a few police in schools. We would like to see legislation that puts more support staff, social workers, psychologists and other people who deal with mental illness in our school system as a way of reducing tensions that contribute to violence.

0910

The provincial safety and equity officer: Again, going back to the Toronto District School Board, the community safety advisory panel recommended the creation

of a provincial safety and equity officer, to be a central repository for the reporting of serious issues of school safety. We have not heard the minister respond to that recommendation by Julian Falconer and the advisory panel. In fact, there is no acknowledgment in the minister's school safety report of the invaluable TDSB report in which this recommendation is included, which is odd—an embarrassing oversight. We do not know whether the minister or the Liberals will speak to many of the recommendations made by Falconer. They claim they have about 80% of what is in the report still to be addressed.

Here are just a few of the specific recommendations from the Falconer report, which, if acted upon, would have considerable impact on the safety of our students for this bill:

"The TDSB should establish school-based teams made up of social workers, child/youth workers and teachers to help family caregivers navigate and access the mental health services their children and youth require, and these teams should make use of a variety of treatment techniques and work across" different disciplines.

"The TDSB should provide wraparound programming in schools where there is a significant population of students who are in jeopardy of falling outside of the education system....

"The panel finds that selected ... schools in marginalized communities should be designated as community hubs. Community hub schools will become the focus of the neighbourhoods that they serve. Local community organizations and groups will be encouraged to become part of the school community, in order to facilitate a closer connection between the school and the students, the parents and the community....

"The TDSB should restore the community outreach worker position. The panel recommends that the community outreach worker gather, coordinate and act as a clearinghouse concerning information about current programs and services provided by the existing community partners and schools.

"In order to facilitate in the building of community hubs, the TDSB should review the level of caretaking staff at each school to determine if there is sufficient staff to maintain the schools such that schools can serve as a welcoming and positive environment for the community....

"The Ministry of Education should increase the benchmark costs for all components of the funding formula (the foundations grant, the special purpose grant and the pupil accommodation grant), so as to close the gap between funding provided and actual costs of operations.

"The panel recommends that the Ministry of Education, in consultation with school boards and other members of the education community, should develop mechanisms for annually reviewing and updating benchmarks in the funding formula and for conducting a more comprehensive overall review of the funding formula every five years.

"The Ministry of Education should increase the funding of the demographic component of the LOG to the

level that is stipulated by the 1997 expert panel that studied the creation of the learning opportunities grant—\$400 million (adjusted to reflect inflation).

“The Ministry of Education should ‘sweater’ the demographic component of the learning opportunities grant so that the funds received by the board are used solely for providing programs to mitigate socio-economic factors affecting marginalized students. The new demographic component should include a built-in accountability process mandating that school boards report annually on the programs and services funded by the grant, and on their effectiveness.

“The Ministry of Education should reconstitute the local priorities amount as 5% of the basic amount of school boards’ pupil foundation grant (updated as per above-noted recommendation), and that boards apply the local priorities amount to locally established priorities, programs and services aimed at the continuous improvement of student learning and achievement with particular focus paid to at-risk schools....

“The TDSB should hire 20 new full-time social workers.

“The 20 new full-time social workers should be dedicated to high-priority schools determined by the board based on criteria that include dropout rates, high absenteeism, suspension/expulsion data, LOI ranking and the number of safety incident reports.

“The panel recommends that the 20 new full-time social workers dedicated to high-priority schools should not be assigned to more than two schools each.

“The TDSB should hire 20 additional child and youth counsellors.

They “should be dedicated to high-priority schools determined by the board based on criteria that include dropout rates, high absenteeism, suspension/expulsion” etc.

“The panel recommends that the TDSB should hire 24 ... attendance counsellors to meet the needs created by the mandatory learning to 18 provisions of Bill 52.”

Additional areas of the bill could address acknowledging old policies that haven’t worked and trying new approaches.

As well as the Falconer recommendations, there are many other things that the government could be dealing with. The bill contains statements like this: “If the minister has established policies or guidelines...,” and “The minister may establish policies and guidelines....” The ministry must establish policy and guidelines, but has not done so since 1994, clarifying the role of everyone involved in reporting and documenting and when such reporting and documenting is to include reports of the OSR. The legislation is based on the faulty assumption that old directives and policies are fine. What is needed is a comprehensive review of policies and procedures and guidelines.

Regarding reporting, it is a matter of the health and safety of our staff as well as our students. If the old policies and procedures were adequate, we wouldn’t have the situation in the schools that we have today. It is the view of many teachers that it is due to the failure to

clarify and define roles, and the failure to keep documentation which would allow province-wide tracking of violent incidents, including those deemed to be less serious. This bill seems to have been largely advanced to address a few instances where principals failed to follow existing board policies on the issue, so it really needed at all—that’s a little confusing.

The NDP have been saying for years that we need to restore and increase the number of social workers, child and youth care workers and support workers in schools.

Gender-based violence and responses: The gender-based abuses and assaults that occur in our schools are so prevalent that they are almost accepted as normal. The government’s response to the criticism of the Safe Schools Act was to simply have school boards suspend fewer students. There are students who will cross the line no matter where you draw it. They must be dealt with to protect the learning environment. While some suspensions are inevitable, many involve special-needs students who are not being offered the programs and support they are entitled to.

Alternative programming: There is a real lack of alternative programming for students who would benefit from education in the trades, service and technical areas. The current approach, which is to lower the dropout rate by lowering expectations, does not give students the skill they require and reduces accountability, which results in lower standards and less discipline in schools.

There is a prosperity gap. Schools are a reflection of the prosperity gap and the tensions and violence that exist in our society. The problems in schools cannot be solved by focusing only on the schools. It is the provincial government, not the boards, who has to accept responsibility for the current situation. The problems contained in the Falconer report and the government’s own task force report are a direct result of the indifference and the lack of support by the government.

More adults in schools: We must compensate for the past indifference and lack of provincial support by immediately providing the funding for social workers, child and youth workers, attendance counsellors, community outreach staff, monitors and extra teachers that the NDP, parents and educators, and now the Falconer report, have called for. We need more adults in our schools and we need them now.

Schools need to be able to provide alternative programming to meet the needs of their students. Our schools must be safe; our students must be protected and free of violence, abuse and threats. Students and their parents must be held accountable for unacceptable behaviour, but this is only possible in a system where parents are given the opportunity to provide their children with a sense of hope based on the legitimate expectation of success in the future.

There is a failure of the Safe Schools Act. There must be rules and sanctions, but our response to violence should not be centred on reporting incidents and sanctions, threats and punishments. If the approach worked, the Safe Schools Act would not have been the spectacular

failure it was. There must be rules to protect our students, and students who engage in criminal behaviour must be dealt with by the criminal justice system.

However, the imposition of sanctions should be the last resort, not the first knee-jerk response to a situation. Essentially, sanctions are an admission of failure on the part of the system. Before sanctions are imposed, we must be able to offer our students every chance for success. Our schools must be given the tools for success, not failure.

Violence in the schools is a product of the problems in our society. The government must take immediate steps to reduce the prosperity gap in our society. We need to provide real opportunity for currently marginalized groups to succeed. We can't be telling marginalized groups that they need to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps when they have no boots. We need a \$10 minimum wage now. Social assistance levels must improve to reflect the reality of raising a family. Adequate public housing must be provided. Municipalities must be helped to provide the social and recreational services which they are required.

In conclusion, we hope the minister and the Liberals will speak to all these issues more than just doing mandatory reporting. This is a first tiny step. The students of this province deserve so much more, and the educators deserve so much more. What are we waiting for?

0920

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I've just got two minutes, but I think I would like to give a little bit of an introduction to the bill, seeing as we're just starting to debate it today. The safe schools action team, which I chair, was re-engaged by Minister Wynne a year ago. We presented our report to her in December, and I'm very pleased that Minister Wynne is acting on it so quickly.

One of the things that she asked us to do in this report was to look at the gaps in reporting. That is why this legislation that we're bringing forward is quite specific, because we know where there already are requirements around reporting, and we know that much of what is in this bill is already done by school staff routinely. But unfortunately, there have been some rather egregious incidents where what would seem to be common sense hasn't been followed. We know that usually it is, but we need to make sure those exceptions aren't happening.

The two gaps we found in reporting were, number one, that school staff don't always report to the principal when there has been some sort of behaviour. It actually is spelled out clearly in the bill what those incidents are. If there is an incident that the principal must consider for suspension, if there is an incident that the principal must consider for expulsion, then the principal needs to be told. How can they make a decision if nobody tells them? That's the first piece.

The second piece was that we found out sometimes that even though principals were aware of these incidents, they didn't always inform the parents of the vic-

tim. Again, the requirement for when you tell the parents of the victim is the same as when you have to report to the principal: The incident is serious enough for the principal to consider either suspension or expulsion. There is an exception here, which is if informing the parent would do further harm to the student; for example, for fear that the student might be punished, thrown out of the home, whatever, by the parent.

I'll talk at some future time about the intervention rules, but that addresses—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I always listen to the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek with interest, and I think his prepared remarks today were well thought through in terms of first supporting and then explaining in some detail the reasons why the bill is more superficial than one would be led to believe. Really, it is an important issue, and I hope to have the chance, in the limited time we're allowed to speak, to address some of the deficiencies of the bill. I have serious misgivings, actually, listening to our critic, Ms. Savoline, who did what I considered a superlative job in commenting critically on an important bill affecting the protection of our youth in our public school system. Doing the right thing is what people perceive is being done here with Bill 157, An Act to amend the Education Act, but in fact it doesn't really deliver.

On closer scrutiny—and I think the member from Hamilton East tried to make this point very clear when he was referring to the TDSB Falconer report. He made it very clear that there were some inconsistencies there: the lack of supports for students at risk. That's that the infrastructure to make this program work is needed, and it simply isn't here. In fact, if you look at the work done on this issue of violence in schools, protecting children, and protecting vulnerable children, and bullying, this bill misses the mark. It's tragic that the public are going to be expecting something to be delivered when in fact it's not being delivered.

I would say that the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek's remarks are worth listening to and worth responding to, and I'd expect that he will, in his summary, let us know if this bill meets the mark or not.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Johnson: It's my pleasure to speak in support of Bill 157, the Keeping Our Kids Safe at School bill. Children have a right to attend school in a safe and caring environment, and I absolutely support this. My roles as a school trustee, past chair of the Trillium Lakeshore District School Board and president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association have given me a unique perspective into the needs of this bill. I would like to thank the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek for his comments this morning.

Over my 12 years as a school trustee, I received many calls from parents, from staff in schools, and from my children and their friends, talking about the need to be

able to feel safe in school. This bill addresses many of the key issues that happen in schools today, such as bullying, violence, vandalism, sexual assault, drug trafficking, etc., and the need for principals to deal with these issues and contact police if necessary, because children need to feel safe.

Enshrining the ability of principals to delegate school discipline and safety issues to a VP or teacher in their absence is another key part of this bill that will do much to ensure that children have the ability to learn in a safe and caring environment. There are many parts of this bill that will certainly improve the quality of education for children throughout Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? Member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank my colleagues from Durham, Guelph and Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. I'd also like to reiterate the work that the member from Burlington, Ms. Savoline, did on this bill. She deserves a lot of credit. She had a lot of good input to this bill, and hopefully there are more things we'd like to see put in down the road.

I'd like to especially thank the member from Durham for his kind words. He shares my opinion that this bill does fall short in many areas that we would like to have seen addressed. The member from Guelph put it in a manner that was well presented; however, she did admit she saw some weaknesses in the bill that she would like to have seen addressed.

I am a firm believer that if you're going to do research and put a bill in front of this House, you should take the time necessary to get it right the first time. That way you avoid future amendments and future private members' bills that have to be brought forward to address some of the issues the bill doesn't address.

I'm not a person who likes to hurry bills through. I like to do my research, analyze it and do the right thing the first time. I don't like bills that skim the surface, so to speak, and there's not a lot of depth. I would like to see bills in the House that actually address all the major issues, not just part of them. It's a start, but as I brought forward, there are a lot of things that have been left out and haven't been addressed that are a major part of the situations we have in schools. I hope that in the future the government will see the light of day and deal with those issues.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's indeed a pleasure to have the opportunity to get some thoughts on the record this morning with regard to Bill 157, the Education Amendment Act (Keeping Our Kids Safe at School), 2009. I think I can bring an interesting perspective to this bill. My wife, Karen, is the vice-principal at St. Anne's school in Peterborough, and one of the jobs of vice-principals, of course, is to look after discipline within a school.

I'm particularly pleased that John Mackle, the director of the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington

separate school board, and his counterpart Ms. Sylvia Terpstra, the director of the Kawartha Pine Ridge public school board, have certainly been extremely active on this file in terms of working with their principals and vice-principals and the need to make sure we have appropriate reporting of incidents in school: areas such as bullying, violence, vandalism, sexual assault and drug trafficking.

Just for the record, John Mackle, the director of the PVNCC, actually started his teaching career with the member from Eglinton–Lawrence at Michael Power school right here in Toronto. I know that the member from Eglinton–Lawrence and Mr. Mackle have had a long-standing relationship and certainly converse from time to time on a number of issues.

0930

There's no question that words mean something. I remember as a young student—those were the days of the separate school system—where you had days off for holy days, and maybe the member from Durham would also remember those days. It was mandatory, of course, to go to mass in the morning. The local priest would do a head count to make sure all the students were there; in the afternoon, it was like a professional development day.

I remember one incident when I was about seven or eight. We were going to the local playground to play some road hockey, and the non-Catholic students saw us all walk by and they said, "There's the dogan family." I'd never heard that term before. I remember going home that evening and asking my mom what was meant by that because, "I'm Jeff Leal, part of the Leal family, and they called us members of the dogan family." My mother explained to me in a very clear and concise manner that "dogan" was a derogatory term for Roman Catholics. I didn't have a clue about that, but I thought about it for a moment. I think it goes to the heart of how words do mean something and how they can have a serious and detrimental effect on students.

I remember in about 1982 we, through Trent University, had a large number of international students that came to Peterborough. In particular, in 1982 I remember there was a very serious incident with a Somali student. It started as verbal abuse of the Somali student and then it worked into physical abuse. The mayor of Peterborough at the time, the late Robert Barker, immediately set up a racial relations committee in the city of Peterborough. He brought together representatives from both school boards and the Peterborough Lakefield police services board to put together a committee. Under that came a local program called the VIP program, which stood for Values, Influences and Peers. This was a program that went into both the elementary and secondary schools in Peterborough to start to work with students in order to educate them and provide information on how we could achieve a higher level of tolerance in the area. I know both Trent University and Fleming College were involved in that program.

I'd like to get on the record today that the president of Trent, Bonnie Patterson, is leaving after 10 years in her

leadership role. We wish her well in her future endeavours. Secondly, the other individual that is leaving is the chancellor, Roberta Bondar, and I want to make reference to her in terms of this bill. Roberta Bondar has been a real hands-on chancellor at Trent University. She spent a lot of time in elementary and secondary classrooms, particularly talking to young females, which I think is extremely important. She talked about her educational background, and indeed, in her case, literally had the opportunity to reach the stars. I think individuals like her are very important to get into the classrooms and highlight serious issues of bullying, violence, vandalism, sexual assault and drug trafficking.

This government has gone a long way over the last six years. As long as I've known you, Mr. Speaker, you've spent a great deal of time in classrooms in the riding of Essex to make sure that we see evidence of a new, much more positive learning environment in our classrooms across the province of Ontario. We've seen more and more teachers hired. We've seen more administrative staff being involved in the system. I think we've gone a long way in the last six years to bring about a higher degree of harmony in our classrooms.

In the future, I look forward to hearing remarks from my new colleague from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, who in his old role prior to his election to the House on March 5 was very involved as chair of the Trillium Lakelands District School Board, bringing forward a lot of the new initiatives that I think have been so helpful in our classrooms.

We have a solid record when it comes to making our schools safer. We amended Bill 212 to include bullying as a suspendable offence. We annualized \$2.3 million for suspension and expulsion programs. We annualized \$10.5 million to support professional resources, more attendance counsellors, psychologists etc. We provided an additional \$10 million for additional supports for urban and priority schools.

One of the great things that we accomplished—the Minister of Transportation is with us today—is that we got rid of those punitive fees for using schools on weekends. We talk about schools being crucial hubs in communities, and certainly in rural communities. Prior to the 2003 elections, they would say, “Mr. Leal, we would love to be using our school gyms on the weekend, but we can't because we can't afford the fees to pay custodian staff time and a half to be there on the weekend.” A lot of those sports activities and community activities are great avenues for our kids to be involved in the community, to socialize, to work with their peers and, frankly, to give them the opportunity to feel part of something. One of the ways that we address bullying, violence, vandalism, sexual assault and drug trafficking is to have people involved in something, feeling that they're worthwhile and can make a contribution. One of the ways they do that is through participation in sports teams and other community activities. The Minister of Transportation needs to be saluted for his leadership in getting rid of those punitive fees. This has been an infusion of financial

resources into our schools that has certainly been very, very well received.

We've also, as I said, provided \$6 million for the Focus on Youth program, \$1 million for Kids Help Phone and \$4 million for training on safe, equitable and inclusive schools. In Peterborough we are very, very fortunate to have Alan Vallillee, who is the director of Kinark children's services, to work closely with both school boards to identify students who need some special help. We're very pleased that Bill 157 is part and parcel of keeping our kids safe in school as a continuation of those programs that we've already put in place.

I'll just touch briefly on the safe schools action team, which did an incredible job—the member from Guelph was very, very involved in that—identifying a gap in reporting requirements in legislation and policy for school staff other than the principal to report serious student-on-student incidents, hearing that parents of victims of serious student-on-student incidents were not always informed, and hearing from students not to ignore inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour and certainly not to condone it.

I think Bill 157 is a comprehensive way to bring all the important parties together to deal with what is and can be a very serious matter, to get to the heart of the matter, provide the appropriate supports to make sure that these incidents don't occur. I'm pleased today to have the opportunity to support Bill 157. I know my school boards in the Peterborough area are very pleased with this piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's always entertaining to listen to the member from Peterborough. He does bring a sort of sentimental approach to it that I can relate to. I believe that if bullying is part of what this intervention bill is about, it is important to make sure that the children are feeling safe and indeed are safe in the schools. I think this bill, as I said before, attempts to do that. I suspect it will have public hearings. I expect it was drafted quickly, even to the extent that the member from Guelph has made comment that there are some shortfalls in the bill. That is true. Our critic, Ms. Savoline, I think, pointed out some very helpful recommendations.

We will likely support the bill, but it just simply does not deliver to make the schools safer. There's nothing going to change here. This is all what Shakespeare called all show and no dough. He said it in a much more fancy fashion, shall we say.

0940

In the next few minutes, I'll have the opportunity to speak on the bill and I will only point out what the bill does; I won't make overt criticisms. But I think the member from Peterborough mentioning that the president of Trent University, Bonnie Patterson, is leaving after 10 years—that is worth knowing. She's a wonderful person—I've met her many times—and I think she has done much for the school.

I would think that this isn't in any way critical of the administration in the schools; what it's critical of is giv-

ing the principals, the chief administrators in the schools, the real tools to do the job and to intervene when and where necessary, which is no different than in the children's aid, where we're protecting our children and their priorities come first. This isn't in the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to compliment the member from Peterborough. He always adds a personal touch to his comments. But I have to say, given his remarks about the comments made about him in the Catholic school, that it wasn't restricted strictly to Catholic schools. Trust me, in the public system we had bullies too. Looking back on those days—and unfortunately, it doesn't happen as much anymore—there would have been that one quiet kid, the one big kid who didn't like bullies, and he would stick up for the little guys or whoever was being pushed around. But now, because of the system and the weapons that are in schools now, people stay out of it because they are afraid for their personal safety.

The member from Peterborough is correct in saying that there are things that continually come up in schools that are new that society is dealing with and that we have to address. There will obviously be more things that will come along down the road that we'll have to address in this House. I feel that in the bill itself—the member from Durham is correct—there are a lot of things that haven't been addressed. But, yes, it is a start, and, yes, we will support it, because we feel that any kind of discipline or restrictive measures in the school system that are going to help clean up our society of the abuse, the bullying and the things that go on in our schools which are unnecessary and unacceptable, we will support in any way we can.

I hope that when there are future bills that come forward that the opposition brings and that address things in schools that could be helpful, the government of the day will take it upon themselves to open their minds and their pens to opposition suggestions, which are very helpful at times, as witnessed by the member from Burlington and her good input.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Je dois tout d'abord remercier et féliciter la ministre de l'Éducation, M^{me} Wynne, pour avoir pris le temps d'étudier à fond ce qui se passe dans nos écoles.

Dans ma région de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, je dois dire que j'ai 54 écoles élémentaires et 12 secondaires. Rarement, nous sommes appelés pour des cas de ce qu'on appelle « bullying », ou des jeunes qui font pression sur les autres.

Mais je dois dire que hier, avec beaucoup de mes collègues, j'ai assisté à un film qui a été présenté ici même à Toronto qui s'appelle « Milk » et qui concerne la discrimination des citoyens de cette ville de la Californie.

Ces choses se passent assez souvent dans nos écoles et je crois aujourd'hui qu'avec ce projet de loi, on va vraiment prendre soin de la discrimination qui se passe et,

aussi souvent, de ce qu'on appelle, encore une fois, la pression qu'on met sur les enfants dans nos cours d'école. Le paragraphe 300.1(1) dit : « Le directeur d'une école peut déléguer par écrit aux personnes suivantes l'un ou l'autre des pouvoirs ou des fonctions que lui attribue la présente partie :

« a) un directeur adjoint de l'école;

« b) un enseignant employé à l'école. »

Donc, cela veut dire que le directeur de l'école va maintenant avoir le pouvoir « d'appointer » ou de donner des responsabilités à ses subordonnés ou aux personnes qui sont sous sa direction afin de s'assurer que dans nos écoles, nos enfants sont bien protégés et sont aussi respectés quant à leur point de vue et leurs droits qui sont employés dans notre belle province.

Encore une fois, je dois féliciter le député de Peterborough pour ses points soulevés.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakubuski: It's a pleasure to comment on the address by the member from Peterborough. I enjoy it when the member speaks in this chamber, because he does add a personal touch to it. But on this particular bill, he spoke mostly about his personal experience and almost never touched on the bill, because there isn't much in the bill.

The reality is that so much of what this government has done in the last four years is about bringing forth pieces of legislation that really don't address, or won't accomplish, the intended goals of the government. It's just fitting into the political agenda of the government.

The member for Peterborough talks about the history. I can well imagine that when he was a young student in that system—and I don't know if he's young or old; I think we're around the same age, but maybe he's a little younger—could he have envisioned that we would be living in a time when 23 schools in Toronto have a policeman on site because of violence in our schools, because of bullying, because of problems, because of uncontrolled acts of violence that continue to go on in our schools? Could he have envisioned at that time, as a student growing up in the system of the 1960s, that we would actually be dealing with these kinds of issues in the province of Ontario, and particularly in the city of Toronto, in 2008 and 2009?

This government continues to talk about addressing the problem of violence in schools, and we're talking about bullying specifically, and mandatory reporting in this instance, but it clearly has done very little to change the environment and the activities that are going on in our schools with respect to violence—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Member for Peterborough, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I appreciate the thoughtful comments from my colleagues from Durham, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Glengarry–Prescott–Russell and my good friend, the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

I want to get on the record that the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell did a superb job of coaching the Ontario LegisKaters a couple of weeks ago. We came up a little short in the game—

Mr. John Yakabuski: It wasn't the coaching, eh?

Mr. Jeff Leal: It wasn't the coaching. No, no, the coaching was expert. The team needs a little bit of work.

But let me get back here. I think the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke makes a good point. You're right: When I was a student at St. John the Baptist in the mid-1960s—I don't want to date myself too much—no, there was never any anticipation of a police officer ever being in my elementary or secondary school.

But one of the key things is that, when I chat with teachers—and the member from Durham's wife, Peg, was an outstanding teacher at PVNCC—part of the problem, as I see it, is that we haven't nipped many of these incidents quickly enough. If you let one incident go, it tends to multiply and it keeps going and going and going until you have a really serious situation where the ramifications are enormous.

One of the things about this bill: When it's fully implemented in 2012, there will be a structure in place that will identify very early where there are incidents of bullying, violence, vandalism and sexual abuse, to bring to bear all the services you can at a very early stage, to make sure that this conduct is changed, and you can do it through a variety of approaches.

I believe sincerely that Bill 157 is targeted at getting to this at a very early stage.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: In the brief time that I'm allowed to comment on the bill, I'm going to try to stick to the bill rather than talk about other things.

The best way to start on this bill is to examine its structure and content and highlight what isn't in it. There has been a lot of work done on this, and I think you have to look at the genesis of why the government is charged with bringing in some satisfactory response to some tragedies in our schools.

0950

I think the most important one that the public would be aware of is the incident at C.W. Jefferys Collegiate. I think that is a very important backdrop, where a young child was abused and injured, etc. I'll just read into the record here: "That incident only came to light during an internal investigation into the shooting-death of Jordan Manners at the school last May." This is part of a report in the National Post on January 7, 2008.

"Allegations had also been made at the time of the attack that school administrators knew of it and had even transferred the girl to another school"—in other words, they took care of the evidence—"but did not tell police or children's aid.

"Six months later, in December 2007, police laid the failure-to-report charges."

That went through a number of steps in the justice system where the charges against the school's adminis-

trators were laid by the police and the former administrators were put on paid leave.

The Child and Family Services Act only says that evidence or suspicion of abuse must be reported forthwith, and that it is certainly in a timely manner. I think that was mentioned by the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke when he said that if there is physical abuse in the school that's suspected—even in the home—the teacher today, under the Child and Family Services Act, has the duty to report. If they don't, they could be charged. My wife was a teacher and Ms. Munro, the next member of our caucus to speak, was a teacher. If they suspect some abuse in the home, they're required to report it. I think that's fair and it's important and it's relevant to this case.

The charges against the school administrators, I said, were dropped. "Justice of the Peace Gabriel John said the charges against Charis Newton-Thompson, former principal at the Toronto school, and former vice-principals Stan Gordon and Silvio Tallevi were sworn last December—well after the six-month time limit in the Provincial Offences Act." That was reported in May 2008.

Attorney General Chris Bentley said at the time that the crown believed that "the charges were laid within the necessary time." So there's the crown laying the charge, and there's the Attorney General, Chris Bentley, a minister in cabinet, saying that they should have been charged in a timely manner, and he believed they were.

Now this is all very technical, but I guess the issue here, without going into too much detail—I'll come back to this to wrap up that story for those that may be interested in the story. But if I read the act, it does nothing more than this—this is important. In section 1—gosh, I wish I had more time. I'm not going to have enough time to cover all this evidence that needs to be put on the table; I'm going to read it, though. Section 300.1 permits the principal of a school—this is the key word—to "delegate" his or her power, duties and functions.

Section 300.2 requires board employees who have become aware that a pupil may have engaged in an activity listed in another section of the bill, section 306 or section 310 of the act, to report on the matter to the principal. So they're delegating these things that the teachers and other people—they have to report to the principal, which is good; they're the top administrator in the school and that's their duty, to run the school in a safe and secure manner.

Here's the issue: Section 300.3—this is the subtlety of this—requires a principal who believes that a pupil has been harmed as a result of an activity listed in sections 306 or 310 of the act to notify the parent or guardian of the pupil. But there's the subjective part here: They're not mandated. They can if they want. That's the subtlety here: They're not mandated to report it to the police. I don't think they're qualified to make an assessment of a medical nature. Was the bruise caused accidentally in the schoolyard or was it inflicted in a fight that they witnessed or somebody witnessed? I think what's missing here is that it should be mandated to be reported, as my

wife would have if she suspected child abuse. It's mandated that they report it. Why isn't that in here?

If I go back to what I was reading earlier, and this is to do with the C.W. Jefferys issue, Chris Bentley said that the crown's position, if the alleged offences are continuing offences, meaning that it found that—face a \$1,000 fine for each day the allegations were unreported. But it goes on to say that in August, Bonnie Croll, an Ontario court judge, deemed that the crown's appeal of the May decision to quash the charges against the principal and vice-principal of C.W. Jefferys—that's August 13, 2008.

The crown argues in its appeal—this is the crown; that's Mr. Bentley's lawyers—that non-reporting of the incidents was a continuous offence and did not end at the time of the alleged assault. The Attorney General's office had 30 days to appeal the decision. Through arbitration, it was decided that Charis Newton-Thompson, the former principal of C.W. Jefferys, would become manager of a curriculum review—in other words, they took her out of her job—in charge of ensuring that current and new curriculum for kindergarten to grade 12 is inclusive and reflects the diverse population of the city etc. Former Vice-Principal Stan Gordon now works at an adult school, while Silvio Tallevi retired. They were probably pressured—I'm saying that without having any real information about that—to get off the front page.

What is the minister actually doing here? As I said before, I'm going to read section 2. This is the bill: "Section 2 of the bill adds subsections (5.1) to (5.4) to section 301 of the act. Subsection (5.1) permits the minister to establish policies and guidelines governing"—here's the key word—"delegation" authority "by principals under section 300.1. Subsections (5.2) and (5.3) permit the minister to establish policies and guidelines requiring certain individuals who are not board employees"—these are volunteers in the school; they must report these observations to the principal. If they see something going on, they've got to report to the principal. Once again it goes back to the principal, who doesn't have to report it. They have this sort of magical power that they can—why wouldn't they report it? Even if you suspect it, you should report it to the police, who are trained to investigate these things.

I think it's a large, gaping hole in the side of the Titanic here. This thing's going to sink. This thing doesn't work. I'm going to read, with your indulgence, Mr. Speaker—I'm finding this more and more difficult as I read the bill—the explanatory notes: "Section 3 of the bill adds subsections (0.1) and (3.1) to section 302 of the act"—all technical stuff. "Subsection (0.1) requires boards to establish policies and guidelines governing"—here it is again—"delegation by principals under section 300.1." So all it does—it's sad to think that they wasted all this ink. I don't even know—I'm just going to get down to the bottom line here.

This thing here is actually one and a half pages long, and we're talking about children's safety. All they had to say is "suspected violence" or "bullying," or use a regulatory framework of words to describe events: pushing,

shoving, bullying, abusing, even calling them a dogan or whatever Mr. Leal called them. This is inappropriate behaviour. This should be reported and investigated by somebody who's trained to investigate. Just because you're a principal or somebody else, it doesn't mean you're qualified; nor am I. I should report. If I saw one of our pages here being pushed around by another page, I think I should have to report that to probably the Speaker or maybe the Sergeant at Arms. It's not appropriate.

This section that I just mentioned delegates this authority back to the principal. I should clarify that here as I read, "set out what the principal shall and shall not disclose when notifying a parent or guardian...."

1000

Why would they withhold anything from the parent? I'm a parent of five children. One of my children is a high school teacher. I always go into that. My children are the most important part of my life. My wife was a teacher, and my children are our pride and joy. Our youngest is 30, so they're older children. I'm obviously much older. One is a teacher in England. One has just finished her master's degree in Scotland. She lives on the Isle of Man. One is in Australia, married with two children. I always talk about that in the Legislature because, really, that's my legitimate story in life. I have two other boys: One is a lawyer in Toronto, and the other works in the medical field.

I just say this: With the parent issue here of being told or not told, I really think they have a responsibility to report the stuff to the parent and family—a single parent even more so, perhaps. The parent is the primary caregiver. The parent is the primary educator. The inflections here are just wrong. They're protecting the system. These three administrators, the principal and two vice-principals, as I told you in this report in the paper, got charged, and actually they moved them for failing to report. They were charged with failing to report this bullying, an event that led to a young student's death.

Let's make it clear here: I fully respect teaching and teaching the subjects that they have degrees and studies in, whether it's math or culture or art or music—very important. But they're not police investigators, and if they suspect something, they should look at it as an adult with a mature mind.

These things have been going on for some time. If you want to look at the McMurtry-Curling report—that was a report commissioned by the McGuinty government. Mr. Curling was the former Speaker of the Legislature. I think he resigned. I'm not sure. He was the Speaker here at one time. He actually sat on this side of the House in opposition and held up the House for some time, but those were in his more sorry days. He worked with the former Chief Justice for the province of Ontario, Roy McMurtry.

Here's what it says: Although the report was commissioned in reaction to the death of Jordan Manners in the hallway of C.W. Jefferys high school, "McMurtry and Curling don't say much about that ... other than noting while schools should call police if serious crime occurs,

they shouldn't be overly quick to react lest 'racialized students' (translation, black students) suffer 'increased criminalization.'"

Then you get into the soft, sensitive socialization of justice. I don't want to get into anything more than that. In other words, if it was thought to be a racial thing going on in the school, maybe they shouldn't exacerbate it by calling in the police. I guess you have to be sensitive to these things.

But how do you feel about the teachers and principals lacking the clarity in the legislation of what they should or shouldn't do? They're hanging it on the principal. Everybody's got a delegated authority to report to the principal, and the principal has to make this big decision. What are they going to do? Realistically, let's review that option.

Realistically, the principal, if they are—and I think most of them are good administrators; no question about that. They're trained and educated. It comes down to, who would they ask for advice? Well, they all have a superintendent that they work with. The superintendent would be making around \$150,000 to \$200,000 a year—pretty well paid. They're not teaching. They're there to be administrators. Some would question if that's too much money, but that's another debate, another day. The superintendent should be saying, "Well, let's look at this case." They're not a police officer either. They're not trained in investigative techniques and other kinds of forensic things—police officers are, and other trained professionals. If the superintendent didn't know, what would they do? Who would they seek advice from? They'd go to the director. The director of education may make as much as \$500,000. What? What are they actually doing? But anyway, that's another question. I raise that question because they should be the ones that are charged, not the principal. Failure to report should result with the top person. It's no different than when we look at the issues in the market today. The buck stops where? At the top, not down in the school or at the middle of the corporation. You don't blame the employee on the floor of a workshop, like the issues going on—AIG is a good example. Lehman is the top guy, I think. That's where the buck stops. He is the guy making \$15 million or whatever he's making. It's just disgusting what these people make. That's a whole other issue that upsets me beyond belief.

But the point I'm trying to make is that this bill delegates the authority—everybody in the school has to report it to the principal. And then the principal may or may not, or should or should not, report it for reasons that could be social—you could be interfering with a little quarrel that's going on. If there's something that's happened that threatens the safety of one child, then all of the children are in threat of their safety. That's what this bill fails to do: to mandate reporting.

I think, listening to the speakers today, and I would even say the new member here, whom I want to congratulate formally, Mr. Johnson from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock—I have known him since 1994, I guess: a

good person, and he will bring a lot to this debate here. I wish he wasn't here, but that's a different debate. It's not because I don't like him, though. I would only say that because he, as well, has a great deal of experience, and he may respond in his two minutes.

Also, the member from Guelph: I remember that before she was here, she was very involved. I think she was the head of all of the school trustees in the province of Ontario, the boards, and she's very highly regarded in the educational sector.

As well, the Minister of Education, even before she was here, was an NDP lobbyist, really.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, I thought she was NDP always. Didn't you? Everybody did, really. But she is very passionate and committed to education.

But this bill fails. It's something I'm going to support because it makes a move in the right direction, but let's get it right.

Our critic had the answer to the question here, and I would say that the member from Burlington, Mrs. Savoline, in her speech—I was in my office last week, and I watched her response as our critic. She said it perfectly, that we want to support it, but we want it to do the job and do the job correctly. That's what this is about, and that's what this debate is about. I bring a bit of that passion that I bring to things because, if you're going to do it, as I said—and the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek said it as well—do it right. We're here. We want to protect the children. That's clear. I don't want any ambiguity about that at all. But the tools simply aren't here in this little one-and-a-half-page bill.

I'd like to find out who is getting to not do it. Who are the stakeholders that are telling them, "No, don't do it"? I wonder who it is. I would like to find out. It could be the teachers' union, because there could be a pay thing involved here. I'm not bashing them. But somebody got to the minister, because they're not doing the job.

I'm going to say that it's a bill where we're all on the same page, but there are not enough pages. There are a few pages missing here. I also am aware that this bill will come into force in 2010 but into full force not till 2012, which conveniently is after the next election.

I think this bill simply doesn't do the job. It's a weak response to an important issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak briefly on this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): This House will recess until 10—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Well, there was one other time when you had me not go into that process, but okay. Questions and comments?

1010

Mr. Paul Miller: I would like to commend the member from the official opposition. He touched on a lot of things that were concerns for me. But there's one item, a big item, in this bill that we're not talking about, and it's the stress on the teachers themselves. My wife also was a

teacher. I'm telling you, when I grew up, if you did something in the school you got disciplined in the school and you got it twice as bad at home.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Four times as bad.

Mr. Paul Miller: Four times as bad. Now some of the parents will go the schools and say, "My little Johnny wouldn't do that."

Mr. John Yakabuski: "Why pick on Johnny?"

Mr. Paul Miller: "Why are you picking on Johnny?" Well, Johnny did do it and Johnny got away with it, and all he has to do is get sent home to play with his computer for three days. That's not the way that the system should be working. You don't reward somebody by sending him home to play with video games or go to the show or go out and play road hockey. I would have been probably cutting lawns, cutting hedges, putting out garbage or painting if I was doing something that my parents would not have tolerated. They would have backed the teacher. Even if maybe I wasn't so guilty, I was still guilty, because that's what maintained discipline in our schools when I was growing up.

That's gone. Now the kids know that the worst scenario is, you're going to go to the principal's office. You can say whatever you want to the teacher. They've got third and fourth graders swearing at the teachers. I would have had a bar of soap in my mouth. I know you can't do that anymore, but that's the way it was. Now the kids are rewarded: "Oh, you go home, little Johnny, and play with your computer games." Absolutely unacceptable.

The discipline begins in the home. If the parents can't control the child, what chance does the teacher have? What chance does the principal have? All the principal can do is expel the kid. That doesn't help the kid, because he's not learning; he's at home playing video games. That's not good for our education system.

The teachers have lost all the instruments of any kind of discipline. They cannot enforce anything, and the kids—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to rise to speak to Bill 157. I just want to clear up a couple of points. It's very clear that this bill will come into effect on February 1, 2010.

I want to speak specifically to some of the comments that the member from Durham made, and that is with regard to the reporting mechanisms by the principal. Clearly, that is covered off in other pieces of legislation. The protocols are well-established. It's not only through government policy; it is also through board policy as well. So that is a very specific point that the member from Durham raised, and I did want to address it and the concerns of the member.

The other thing that I wanted to speak to today was to talk about the schools. As many of you know, I have over 45 schools in my riding, and one of the things that I notice when I go into the schools is that in every school, down the hallways, we talk about respect. We talk about general behaviour which is supportive of everyone's in-

dividual rights. They talk about things that are important to them, and also that they, the children themselves, want an environment that is conducive to respect for every student. They know that and they understand that. I know that when I talk to the students, that's one of the things that they talk about: respect, and a global understanding.

I just wanted to relate: I had a school that sent me 15 letters of all of the issues that were important to grades 3 and 4. They took the time—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to have this opportunity to make a couple of comments with regard to the member from Durham's speech.

I think the important thing for us here to understand is that the purpose of the bill was to close the gap, and yet, when one looks at the reality of the problems that are faced by many schools and, very importantly, many students and their families, this does not. It may paper over, but the critical issues still remain in the schools.

The minister, in response to a number of comments made by the education critic and others, has referred to the amount of money that is being spent. But when I look at the families that are impacted through bullying and things like that, and the victims who have had the temerity to come forward, clearly this bill really does only paper over that gap. It doesn't do anything particularly for those victims. So rather than send letters out about all the millions of dollars that have been spent, the minister needs to be looking at the effectiveness and the accountability of that, and how that is helping the individual children who are the perpetrators and those who are the victims. In the course of all of this, they seem to have been lost in this discussion. We're still left with mechanisms that will not stand that test, that strength, to be able to make sure that there's proper—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

This House will recess until 10:30 of the clock.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The House recessed from 1016 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I'm very pleased to introduce the mother of our page Jackson Amos and his grandparents Glen and Karen Jackson. They came all the way from Emo to be with us. The page is acting as the captain of the team today.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I'm pleased to introduce today a guest from Windsor, Tina D'Agnillo, who's the mother of page Michele D'Agnillo from Windsor West. A special welcome to Tina.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm more than delighted to be able to present to you staff from the Ministry of Natural Resources' wildlife section. There are 17 of them here today. These are the folks who implement and develop the very ecologically based strategic policies for

the ministry. We are delighted that they are going to share the session with us this morning.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Today we are welcoming a large contingent from the mining sector in the province of Ontario, many of whom will be meeting with a number of our colleagues today. So, certainly, I want to welcome representatives from the Ontario Mining Association and others from the sector. Also, if I may invite all members to come to our Meet the Miners reception this afternoon starting at 5:30 p.m. in the legislative dining room.

Welcome to all the delegations.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of page Teresa Baszak, we would like to welcome her mother, Margaret, her brother John, her brother Luke, her grandmother Irene and her grandmother Dorothy Breen. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

On behalf of page Victoria Carney, we would like to welcome her mother, Sylvia Carney, to the Legislature today.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask all members to join me in welcoming the group of legislative pages and ask the pages to assemble for introduction, please:

Jackson Amos, Mississauga–Erindale; Mark Ang, Don Valley East; Teresa Baszak, Etobicoke–Lakeshore; Renée Bongers, Leeds–Grenville; Victoria Carney, Kitchener–Waterloo; Carmen Chen, Markham–Unionville; Ian Coomes, Halton; Michele D'Agnillo, Windsor West; Lisa Di Vona, Simcoe–Grey; Daphnée Dubouchet–Olsheski, Ottawa–Vanier; Everett Kehew, Oxford; Sean Kyte, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke; Sarah Nadon, Sault Ste. Marie; Michael Niven, Algoma–Manitoulin; Emily Parker, Barrie; Olivia Peters, Scarborough Southwest—and the Speaker's niece, Ahsan Shahzad, Brampton West; Noel Smith, Whitby–Oshawa; Megan Wood, Scarborough–Guildwood; Marissa Yott, Burlington.

Welcome, pages. Please resume your positions.

It is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Through you, Speaker, to the Premier: Today's media reports are indicating that you intend to once again break a solemn promise and impose new taxes on struggling Ontario families through tax harmonization. I quote something you said just last June: "Why would you raise taxes in a time of economic challenges?" That's you saying that, Premier, just a few months ago.

Can you confirm that your apparent addiction to spending and increased taxes is leading you down the path to yet another broken promise?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There's always a tremendous amount of delicious speculation at this time of the year, and I guess that's only natural, and probably healthy in a democracy.

What I can say and what I will repeat as we very much look forward to the budget tomorrow is that there are two overriding objectives we are seeking to achieve in the budget. Number one is that we want to help Ontario families better weather this global economic storm. Secondly, we want to strengthen this economy. The recovery will come, and when it does, we want to be in a position to seize those new opportunities and new possibilities. We understand that a strong economy is the foundation on which are built our good-quality public services. So we'll do both: help our families and strengthen the economy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: In the last provincial election, we all remember the Premier saying, "I won't cut your taxes, but I promise I won't increase them, either." Talk about déjà vu. If indeed on Thursday you break another solemn commitment to the people of Ontario, sir, I think you can be accurately described as a serial promise breaker, and suffering Ontarians are paying the price.

Premier, do you believe that, as leader of the government, breaking your word to the people of this province is perfectly acceptable?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I think before the accusations begin, we should wait for the budget and we'll see what it does. I'm always interested, of course, in the views held by the opposition, but I'm more interested in the views held by the people of Ontario. We will be inspired by their values and their aspirations.

Again, I think there are a couple of things that they want us to do in this particular budget, and it's an important budget, given the times. They want us to see if we can do more to help each other through this difficult period. At the same time, they want to have a reason to be hopeful for their future. They want to know that, coming together, we can strengthen our economy; we can build a more solid foundation for our future growth and future jobs. Our budget will speak to both those overriding objectives.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm hearing a number of comments from the government side regarding an ongoing police investigation and I would appreciate those comments not being made in this chamber.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Yesterday, the Premier was musing about his first big breach of faith, bringing in the largest tax increase in the province's history after another of his solemn election promises not to increase taxes. He said Ontarians forgave him for that whopper and he's confident he can lead struggling Ontarians down the path once again, that they will forgive and forget. That's an open insult, in my view, to Ontario voters.

Premier, these are difficult times. Hundreds of thousands of people have lost their jobs. Families and com-

munities are struggling. How can you, in good conscience, once again break faith with the people of Ontario and bring in new taxes that will hurt the most vulnerable during these difficult times?

1040

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It is true: There are some things that Ontarians will have a hard time forgetting. That \$5.6-billion deficit which was hidden from their view was something that was very disappointing for them.

Fortunately, working together with Ontarians, we have eliminated that deficit. We have had a number of years of solid economic growth. We have fixed the roof while the sun was shining. Today Ontarians have better schools, better health care, better environmental protections, better supports for our most vulnerable and a stronger economic foundation.

But now we need to do more. I'm in full agreement with that: We need to do more to protect our families from this storm and to strengthen the foundation of the economy so it will support public services going into the future.

TAXATION

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Back to the Premier: In 2004, the Premier wanted to tax meals costing under \$4. It was only after a massive protest and negative polling results for the Liberal Party that he backtracked. This latest tax grab goes to show that the Premier continually is simply looking for ways to siphon hard-earned money from Ontario families. You live in taxpayer-subsidized housing in a tony Toronto neighbourhood. You're in a comfortable bubble.

Do you have any idea what average Ontario families are going through right now and what your latest tax grab is going to do to them?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, my honourable colleague is making assumptions and speculating. He's within his rights to do that, but I think we should wait for the budget and see what the actual positions found within that are.

One of the things that I can say, that I said before, is that we will find ways to provide better supports to Ontario families. These are difficult times. We're going to take measures at the same time to strengthen the economy, because we know that unless we enhance our capacity to do so, we are going to place our public services at risk. So we will do both, once again: Protect our families to help them weather the storm and strengthen the economic foundation so that we can better support our public services.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I think it's pretty clear from the Premier's public comments that they're going ahead with this, and I'm not sure that he understands the scope of this tax grab. It's going to increase the cost of diapers, hygiene products, heating fuel, food, books for students, used cars, municipal services and housing. On

top of your new tax for home energy audits, you're now slapping down seniors, people with disabilities and those on fixed incomes with another one of your tax grabs.

Premier, you already have the folks in this province by the throat. How much tighter are you going to squeeze them?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member to withdraw his comment, please.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Speaker, I will respect your request and withdraw.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Yesterday, the leader of the official opposition said that his party is, in theory, in favour of a single sales tax. We know that the federal Conservative Party is in favour of a single sales tax. When this party prepared a minority report for the advice offered to the Minister of Finance, they said that we should heed the call of the federal government and take immediate action to fix Ontario's uncompetitive tax structure. I'm trying to figure out from one day to the next where they stand on this issue, because yesterday they appeared to be in favour of it but today they are saying that they're afraid of it. We're not quite sure where they stand on this particular issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: That's yet another effort by the Premier to muddy the waters and get people away from the fact that he's breaking another solemn promise. That's what's happening here. How can the people of this province trust this Premier in terms of anything he says—anything he says?

Premier, how many more times are you willing to make a promise and then turn around and break it? You said yourself that an economic downturn is the worst time to increase taxes. Did you even believe it when you said it yourself?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're looking forward to delivering the budget tomorrow in this august chamber. We're looking forward to speaking to the values and aspirations of the people of Ontario. We're looking forward to ensuring that we work as hard as we can to achieve two overriding objectives: help families today better weather this global economic storm and, at the same time, strengthen our economy.

But there's one more thing I'm looking forward to, and that's the reaction of the opposition to our budget, because when they're staring in the face of the specifics, it will be important to know whether or not they're with the people of Ontario in the supports that we provide them to help them better manage the challenge of the day. It will be interesting to learn whether or not they're in favour of strengthening the economy and lending support to Ontario businesses.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Premier: During one of Ontario's worst recessions, with tens of thousands of jobs lost, why is the Premier going to be raising taxes on

things like heating oil, diapers, children's clothing, feminine hygiene products and other basic essentials that families need?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll try to be as creative as I can, but I'm not sure I can keep saying the same thing in so many different ways to so many different questions.

There's a lot of anticipation when it comes to the budget, and I can understand that. As I said before, it's natural and I think it's healthy. But what I can say to my honourable colleague is: Take a look at what we've done during the course of the past five years. Take a look at our most recent announcement to accelerate a dramatic enhancement of the Ontario child benefit from \$50 a month to \$92 a month at a time of great economic challenge. That was a plan we'd originally put in place to achieve by 2011, but we brought that forward to 2009 because we thought it was important to help struggling families.

If the member wants to get a good sense of where we're going to go, take a look at where we've been.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: On Thursday, the McGuinty Liberals are inviting Ontarians to celebrate their "8% more" event. That's 8% more to heat their homes, 8% more to dress their kids, 8% more to read the paper, 8% more for the corner hot dog and even 8% more to take the family dog to the vet. Why is the Premier slapping an 8% sales tax on families at a time when they can least afford it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, there's all kinds of speculation here. We'll be looking forward to introducing the budget in the House. I think—I hope—the member will be supportive of the measures that we put in place to protect our families and provide them with additional supports.

But we've got a couple of objectives here. To repeat: We have to find a way to better support our families, including those who struggle the most, and at the same time we have to find ways to better strengthen our economy. The recovery will come, and when it does come, we want to seize those new opportunities. So that's what our budget will do.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: A few months ago, this Premier told families to go shopping; that was going to help the economy. Since then, he got a call on his direct line from big business, and when they said, "Jump," he said, "How high?"

Now the Premier is saying, 8% more on heating oil, educational books, veterinary care, bicycles, vitamins, and dry cleaning, right in the middle of an economic crisis that has left Ontarians worrying about their jobs, their savings and their pensions. What planet is this Premier on, to hit families with an 8% tax right in the middle of a jobs crisis?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I've always said that proceeding with a single sales tax could not happen, could not even be contemplated, unless we had significant fed-

eral support and unless we had in place protections for Ontario families. I've always said that.

But what puzzles me a little bit is that the NDP still have in place, to the best of my knowledge, a policy that we increase the Ontario provincial sales tax by 1%. Unless the honourable member is prepared to say today that that is no longer the party position, I continue to ask myself why it would be helpful to Ontario families to increase the PST by 1%.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Question? Leader of the third party.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This Premier's tax grab—

Interjection: To the Premier.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Premier; sorry. This Premier's tax grab is not just on everyday purchases; this regressive sales tax grab means higher taxes on new homes.

Between January and March, Ontario lost 27,000 construction jobs across Ontario. Housing starts are down 35% year over year. When prospective homebuyers are struggling and the residential construction sector is hurting, why is the Premier raising the tax on new homes?

Interjection.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, it's—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Just trying to help.

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: You're more than helpful.

My colleague raises real concerns, and I do not want to dismiss those, but I would ask her to hold her fire until she sees the budget and sees the initiatives that we put in place.

We are mindful of the needs of families, particularly struggling families, at this point in our history. We're mindful of the needs of the economy as well. We sense that if we don't do more to strengthen this economy, which is under tremendous stress as a result of both this worldwide recession and the growing impact of globalization, we're going to put at risk our capacity to support those good-quality public services. That's why our budget will do both: help families today, and strengthen the economy for tomorrow.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: Housing starts in Barrie are down 72%; in Hamilton, 55%; Kingston, down 72%; Oshawa, down 71%; Toronto, down 40%; Ottawa, down 18%. In one month alone, 27,000 jobs were lost in the construction sector. If people are not buying houses, nobody is going to be building them, Premier.

Why is this Premier raising taxes on new homes in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I mentioned the other day that there's a report from the UN saying that we're losing 30 million to 40 million jobs globally because of this worldwide recession.

Construction is a real concern for us, but that's why one of the really good pieces of news is the one that I announced just a couple of days ago with Minister Smitherman. We're investing \$32.5 billion in infrastructure over the course of the next two years. That's 300,000 jobs that we're talking about there. That's new roads and schools and hospitals and public transit. It's designed to put as many people to work as we possibly can right away. At the same time, it improves quality of life in our communities and it enhances economic productivity.

So, the fact is we're doing much right now to invest in jobs, particularly in the area of construction.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's really obvious that the Premier is out of touch with the people of this province. He just doesn't seem to get it. Ontarians are about to be slapped with yet another tax, a regressive tax, that's going to take hundreds of dollars directly out of their pockets, a few dollars at a time, every time they visit the drugstore or the grocery store. How does this do anything to get people through the tough times that we're experiencing in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I'd ask my honourable colleague to wait and see the specifics of the budget and the supports that we put in place to better help our families.

When Minister Matthews and I attended the Cabbagetown Youth Centre a few days ago, we had an opportunity to meet with some families there, and I remember in particular talking to a mother whose household income, she told me, was \$16,000. She lived with her husband, two kids—one six, one four years of age—and her mother-in-law. She told me that her greatest wish was just to have enough money to put her six-year-old into swimming lessons. That's why I was proud, on behalf of Ontarians, to tell that mom, and all struggling moms, that we're going to take the Ontario child benefit from \$50 to \$92 a month. That additional \$42 a month—it's not the end of the world; I understand that—is a bit more to help those moms make those decisions that are important to those families.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services.

Minister, small businesses across Ontario desperately need to get access to capital. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business reports that the number of businesses in Ontario struggling to access financing through banks has almost doubled from 15% in 2007 to 28% by the end of 2008.

Our party is proposing an access-to-credit program, similar to the federal government's Canada small business financing program, but run through Ontario's credit unions. This program would help new businesses get started, as well as help them make improvements and expand. A program like this would stimulate economic growth and create jobs in Ontario.

Minister, are you willing to implement a program like this that would give small and medium-sized businesses much-needed access to capital?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to thank the member for asking this question.

Let me say the small businesses actually are the backbone of this economy and there is an issue with regards to the availability of credit to small and medium-sized businesses these days. But we have, over the term of our government, actually come up with a program to assist small businesses and have also taken the opportunity to talk to the banks to make sure they can develop a program that can assist small businesses.

Let me just talk about a couple of programs that we have actually developed to help small businesses. We want to make sure that small businesses do business outside the province and outside the country, with countries that they haven't done business with before. That's why we came up with the market access program, under which small businesses and medium-sized business—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Minister, you have an opportunity to create some wealth and make a difference in this province. Let me give you an example of exactly what I'm talking about. In my riding there's the manufacturer Bent Ply of Muskoka. They make theatre chairs, office equipment and skateboards. I received a letter from Kenneth Smith, the president. In it, he writes, "In the last half a year, we have acquired a major new customer and have invested over \$500,000 in new equipment just to be able to process the orders for this new customer. The payback on this equipment alone is staggering, and assistance from local banks has been next to nil, as their lending hands are tied. Our credit lines are at their maximum levels and we will not be able to continue on this current course."

Minister, this business operator needs access to capital that currently is not available anywhere. Are you prepared to step up and do something that could really help businesses like Bent Ply of Muskoka?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Actually, we have already done that. Let me just give you an example. Through the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters Association, there is the Smart program under which organizations that want to buy productivity improvement tools or equipment are entitled to get up to \$50,000 worth of grant under that program. So I would encourage the member on the other side to look at these programs, and he should really advise the organizations that are looking for this funding that these programs already exist.

In addition to that, we also have money available through the Yves Landry Foundation in order to provide training for employees who really want to use productivity improvement programs to become more productive, efficient and competitive in the marketplace.

So I really want to encourage the member to look at the programs. He should be proactively promoting these programs for the small and medium-sized businesses in—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SEVERANCE PAYMENTS

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. Later today, the Canadian Auto Workers will be holding a rally right out here in front of the Legislature. They'll be demanding action from your government to help the thousands of laid-off workers who are being denied monies legally owed to them by employers who just don't care.

The CAW knows that it's not just a federal jurisdiction. The CAW knows that the primary responsibility for this sorry state of affairs lies with the government of Ontario's refusal to implement a provincial wage earner fund similar to that outlined in Bill 6. Why has the government refused to pass a bill that would ensure that every Ontarian gets the back pay, vacation pay and severance pay owed to them by law?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: The member is well aware that there is no subnational jurisdiction that has such a program. It is the responsibility of the federal government.

When anybody loses their job, we empathize and we sympathize with them. We are there to work with those families and ensure that we can do what we are here to do as a provincial government. I know that the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade reaches out right away to those employers, to the municipalities, to look for new job opportunities. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, as soon as they are aware of a plant closure, are there within the hour to work with trade unions, work with the employees and work with our partners to ensure that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: The minister's comments are not exactly correct. The truth is that despite the real pain and suffering of so many workers and their families, we have a provincial government here that's refusing to act on an issue that is clearly—clearly, Minister—within your jurisdiction. My Bill 6, which passed second reading in the Legislature in 2007, deals directly with the problems that are going on in society right now. Why does this government continue to block a bill that would ensure that workers get the back pay, vacation pay and severance pay that they are entitled to as workers in this province?

1100

Hon. Peter Fonseca: The member is well aware that what he is introducing would be a payroll tax and would cost jobs in this province. Also, the member is well aware of our advocacy and what we are asking for, and he should talk to his federal counterpart, where we would like to see changes to the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act that would bring employees to the super-creditor status. This would go a long way. My predecessors and I have also written to federal Ministers of Labour to enrich the wage earner protection program. We will continue to do

this. I ask that the member pick up the phone or write a letter to his federal counterpart to ensure that those programs can be enriched. He knows full well that this falls under the jurisdiction of the federal government.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: My question is for the Attorney General. We know that these are challenging economic times for Ontarians. It is during these times that families are all the more aware of managing their expenses and of ensuring that they get fair value for their hard-earned dollars. We are increasingly aware of the anger and frustration felt by Ontarians when they look to purchase concert tickets on the Internet. This frustration mirrors that felt by members of the public elsewhere in North America. People cannot understand why companies who sell tickets at face value can also take part in reselling them at greatly inflated values. I know the Attorney General spoke about this issue recently and indicated he would be asking his officials to consider what options were available to address these concerns and further protect consumers from unfair ticket selling practices. Since the Attorney General first spoke about this issue, a number of other jurisdictions—federal, provincial and also south of the border—have joined in voicing concerns about fair practices. Can the Attorney General tell this House what steps the government is taking to ensure that Ontarians are treated fairly?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The member raises a very important point. We've heard loud and clear from Ontarians that they want fair access to tickets, and they are concerned about the unfairness of an entity benefiting both from the primary ticket market and from the resale or secondary ticket market. I called Ticketmaster in. They assured us they weren't holding back tickets from the start of sale, that they weren't hoarding tickets and there was no automatic link between their primary seller and their secondary seller. I asked them to go a step further. I asked them to do what they've done in Manitoba, I asked them to do what they've done in Alberta, and stop the resale of tickets for events in Ontario when they were in the primary market. They refused to do that, so I will be working with my colleague from small business to bring in legislation to protect Ontario consumers.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: The constituents in my riding will be pleased to hear that the McGuinty government and the Attorney General are taking these steps to ensure Ontarians are treated fairly when they go to buy tickets for a concert. The McGuinty government clearly understands that the families in Ontario deserve the same protections offered to consumers in other provinces and jurisdictions. I applaud you for committing to introduce legislation to ensure this. What can consumers in Ontario do to make sure that they are protected?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I would like to thank the member from Pickering-Scarborough East for asking this

question. The goal of my ministry is to make sure that consumers are protected, whether they are buying a house or repairing their house, or even when they are buying tickets. There are a couple of things that I would like to suggest. One is that if there is any issue with regard to consumer complaints, they should really refer to the consumer protection branch of the consumer affairs ministry, and they can get some assistance from them. The other is, there are very useful hints available on the website of the consumer affairs ministry where they can seek help as well. But the Ticket Speculation Act falls under the responsibility of the Attorney General and we are working very closely with him to make sure that our consumers are protected. So I really want to thank the Attorney General for taking the lead on this file and taking the—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, and I don't need the help of the member from Nepean—Carleton.

POVERTY

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Minister, you have spent most of the last year claiming to develop a poverty reduction strategy, yet your government is now set to put new sales taxes on hundreds of items that people use every day, even those needed by our children. Low-income Ontarians will now have to pay more for food items, children's clothes and even haircuts. Minister, did you speak up for poor children in Ontario when the Premier and finance minister proposed new taxes at the cabinet table?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you very much for the question. This is kind of an astounding question, I have to say. First of all, you know that we're not going to be speculating on what's in tomorrow's budget. But when it comes to poverty reduction we are making some very important initiatives. I would welcome the support of the party of the opposition to support us in our determination to reduce child poverty and poverty overall in this province. We have announced that included in the budget will be an increase, a speed-up, to the Ontario child benefit. It will make an extraordinary difference for families in this province.

I look forward to the supplementary, but when it comes to poverty reduction, I welcome any support from the members of the opposition.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Minister, you will even charge new taxes on diapers. This is a tax on babies. Even kids' hockey or soccer uniforms will now be taxed.

Minister, why don't you stand up and speak up for Ontario's children? Tell us how adding millions of dollars in new taxes on Ontario's poorest and most vulnerable will help lift them out of poverty. How are you going to write this tax hike on the poor into your poverty strategy?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: When it comes to people standing up and speaking out for those who are living in poverty, I think the question should be directed to you, not to us. We are the party that has developed a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. You are the party that has voted against every support to low-income people that we have brought forward. I say that it's time for you to take your responsibility to the people of this province seriously. It's time for you to understand that people living in poverty need the help of all of us in this House—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The minister has 10 seconds to respond.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Last week, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care was musing about delisting more insured health services. We know from the government's previous delisting of optometry, physiotherapy and chiropractic services that this doesn't save money; it just shifts the burden to other parts of the health care system. Often, for people who can't afford them, they have to go without.

Ontarians want an answer from the Premier today. Why won't he stand up for medicare and commit to not delisting any more services?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think we have a pretty solid record of progress when it comes to investing in and achieving progress for Ontarians when it comes to their health care. Whether you're talking about more doctors, more nurses, more hospitals, shorter wait times or more investments in new technologies like MRIs, I think the record speaks for itself. There's always more to be done. Health care demands are ever-growing and ever-pressing. But again, I think the record demonstrates very clearly our commitment and our belief that one of the highest priorities for our families is their health care, and we'll continue to demonstrate that through this and ensuing budgets.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The Premier was elected on a promise to strengthen our public medicare system, but all we've seen lately are actions that destabilize it. His decision to reinstate competitive bidding in home care has set the stage for labour unrest; 3,000 home care workers have started rotating strikes. He reversed his promise to hire 9,000 new nurses, sending chills. Long-term-care facilities are still waiting for the promised 2,500 extra personal support workers, and they cannot make the numbers work. Hospitals are facing soaring deficits and are contemplating cuts and layoffs. Private clinics are growing like mushrooms.

What is this government going to do to bring stability and trust back into medicare?

1110

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just can't share the perspective of my colleague. I think, from any objective perspective, we've made tremendous progress in Ontario when it comes to health care. Again, I'm not going to get into specific numbers, but nurses and doctors and family health teams—we're going to be the first province in Canada to go ahead with something called a nurse practitioner-led clinic. In fact, there's one in Sudbury. That's never happened before.

So we're looking for new ways to put in place better supports for more Ontario families when it comes to the quality of their health care. The record, I think, speaks to that very clearly.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the Minister of Education. Parents are very concerned about school safety. Parents in my riding of Willowdale have been following closely and with much interest the debate on Bill 157. The government has improved school safety over the past years, introducing anti-bullying measures and programs to help at-risk students, funding secure entrances and security cameras, enhancing the training of principals and teachers and putting more caring adults in the schools.

But there's always room for improvement. Can you tell my constituents how Bill 157 is going to continue to expand and enhance these safety protections?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We know that all school staff play a critical role in building and sustaining a positive school climate. The proposed legislation is part of our ongoing efforts that the member opposite has outlined. If passed, what this legislation will do is these three things: It will require all school staff to report serious student incidents, such as bullying, to the principal so the principal can then respond appropriately. Secondly, it will require principals to contact the parents of victims of serious student incidents. Thirdly, it will require staff to intervene to address inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour amongst students, behaviours such as racist or sexist comments that are unacceptable in our schools.

What this does is build on our safe schools strategy. It puts in place a comprehensive response to the safe schools action team and codifies much of what already does happen in our schools.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. David Zimmer: My constituents in Willowdale understand that there's no magic solution, no quick fix to making schools safer. They know it's a gradual process, a complex process, and it involves a lot of parties. Many of them do believe that Bill 157 is an important element in making the schools safer.

However, some constituents are saying that the mandatory reporting provisions in Bill 157 are inadequate, and they're asking for mandatory reporting to the parents of the victim. Minister, why does the proposed legislation

leave that reporting decision to the discretion of the principal? Some parents don't think that's right.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I appreciate the member for Willowdale raising this question, because it is something that has been a concern. The current safe school provisions of the Education Act require that parents of aggressors be informed of incidents for which students are suspended. That's already in the act. If Bill 157 passes, that would extend that right to the parents of the victim unless—and there are these caveats—the student is not a dependent, i.e., they're 18 years or older; or that student is 16 or 17 and has formally withdrawn from parental control; thirdly, if, in the opinion of the principal, contacting the victim's parents would put the student in a harmful situation, from the parents. It's really unfortunate, but that does happen, and we need to acknowledge that principals need that discretion. We have a lot of respect for the principals in our schools as very important—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

TAXATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Minister of Consumer Services. Tomorrow in Ontario it will be more expensive to build a house, it will be more expensive to heat that house, it will be more expensive to raise a family, it'll even be more expensive to keep the family pet if your government harmonizes sales taxes. Your government will be raising taxes on everything all Ontarians purchase.

As consumer services minister, have you told the Minister of Finance enough is enough, and that in this economic climate consumers just can't take any more tax hikes?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think this question has been answered so many times by the Premier in the House.

Let me say this: I am not aware of what is in the budget, or not, and I don't know how the people in the opposition are aware of it, but there are two things we are planning to do. I think one is to protect our vulnerable in society, and the other is to make the province friendlier from the business point of view. That will be the objective that we will have in mind as we move forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: What I heard over there is, if it eats, they're going to tax it; if it moves, they're going to tax it; if it breathes, they're going to tax it; and if it stands still, they're going to tax it.

First it was the health tax, then it was increased user fees, then there was the tax and power grab in Bill 150, and now it's the HST. It's a tax-hike bonanza over there.

Tomorrow, consumers will be faced with higher—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Perhaps the members wouldn't need their earpieces if the tone in the chamber was a little lower.

Please continue.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In seriousness, the members opposite should know that tomorrow consumers will be faced with higher taxes on everything from water heaters and furnaces, child care, plumbing and electrical supplies. Unbelievably, Seeing Eye dogs will be taxed. You're even going to raise the taxes on baking soda.

Consumers in this province can't catch a break with this minister at the cabinet table. Will he stand up for Ontario's consumers, or is he going to continue to sit idly by and allow these continued attacks on—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: It's really unfortunate; sometimes we believe in this House that the louder we talk, the more effective we are. Sometimes it's worthwhile to really listen and say what needs to be done.

The Premier has said again and again in this House that we should wait for the budget and see what is in the budget.

We will not bring a budget that will not protect our vulnerable, and we will make sure that we have the right atmosphere for our business people as well.

DEADSTOCK INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture. Today, farmers are protesting at Queen's Park because the McGuinty government has cut the \$5-million program to ensure the safe disposal of deadstock from Ontario farms. Deadstock removal costs have increased because of new requirements to prevent BSE. Governments bear some of the responsibility for BSE, and therefore governments should bear some of the responsibility for the safe removal of dead farm livestock.

At a time when there are major concerns about food safety, how does the McGuinty government justify cutting the \$5-million-a-year deadstock removal funding?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I think it's important that we have this opportunity to get the facts before the people of the province.

Our government has invested \$19 million in this particular sector, since coming to government, to enable this industry to transition to a sustainable way to manage the product on farm.

When we came to government, there were no regulations that would provide for a safe and environmentally responsible way to manage this waste on farms or in centralized facilities. We now have that in place. Two years ago we told our stakeholders—producers and those who pick up deadstock—that they had \$4 million we were going to transition to this new regulatory regime, which is in place in other provinces in Canada. It is not—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

1120

Mr. Howard Hampton: Other provinces in Canada—for example, Quebec and Alberta—do find ways to help

farmers pay for the cost of safe disposal of dead farm livestock. We've continued to have a problem here in Ontario, and farm organizations are telling you that you continue to have a problem. BSE continues to be a problem, in terms of food safety.

Farmers are willing to pay some of the share of disposing of dead farm livestock. They're prepared to pay some of the costs. Why isn't the McGuinty government prepared to pay some of the costs of ensuring food safety?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I would like to share with the honourable member that in Alberta most of the deadstock is rendered on-farm. Deadstock that is picked up is totally paid for by the farmer. In Quebec, the same would be the case.

What I am also very happy to report to this House is that the province of Ontario is prepared to sign a going-forward document with the federal government. It will provide resources for producers who are prepared to do environmental farm plans. Managing deadstock would be a part of that plan. Any investment that they would make to safely manage that product on their farm would qualify for that funding.

This is a transition that we have effected by working with producers and those in the industry. We believe that, going forward, it is more sustainable and more environmentally friendly than what we inherited. That is what we are committed to implementing.

TRUCKING SAFETY

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. I understand that as of January 1, 2009, legislation came into effect to cap the speed of most large trucks in Ontario at 105 kilometres per hour using an electronic device, a speed limiter.

I also understand that Ontario has worked closely with Quebec to harmonize our speed limiter laws in order to ease traffic and trade concerns between the provinces, with our laws even coming into force on the same day.

On almost all roads across the province, drivers of passenger vehicles must share the road with transport trucks. While most truck drivers are very good drivers, I do hear from my constituents on concerns surrounding truck safety. They worry about many things, but one of the top concerns raised is the speed at which some of the large trucks travel.

I am asking the Minister of Transportation to share with this House what this new legislation means for large trucks on our roads and what the benefits are of speed-limiting—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. James J. Bradley: That's an excellent question. As of January 1 of this year, as members may be aware, most large trucks in Ontario must have a speed limiter in place and set at 105 kilometres an hour. Quebec put this into effect exactly the same way we did, on the same date, so that it is synchronized in the two provinces.

The benefits are clear: Once fully implemented, we will see a 280,000-tonne reduction in greenhouse gas emissions each year. That's the same effect as taking 2,700 tractor-trailers off the road. We'll see an increase in road safety—research shows that excessive speed is a factor in 23% of crashes—and, finally, a significant decrease in fuel consumption that will benefit truckers financially: approximately 100 million fewer litres of diesel fuel used by the trucking industry each year.

We're pleased that Transport Canada has confirmed what we—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'd like to thank the minister for sharing the benefits of this legislation, especially when it comes to road safety. However, I would like to let the minister know that I also have heard some criticism of this new law.

I've been asked about the educational aspect of this new law. How are we letting truckers know the new rules, especially those who are out-of-province or from the US? I have heard that concerns have been raised around who was consulted on this legislation. I have also heard that it can be quite expensive to install a speed limiter on a truck that is not already equipped with one, and for those who already have a speed limiter in place, it can be expensive to have it turned to 105 kilometres. I have heard that because of this and other reasons, speed limiters may hinder trade with the US and with provinces which do not have speed limiter laws in place.

I'm hoping the minister can respond to the above concerns and share with this House the answer to those criticisms.

Hon. James J. Bradley: We introduced this law after extensive consultation with the trucking industry and the general public. There were public hearings held. Once the law passed, regulations were posted on the regulatory registry for public comment. We listened to the feedback we received from everyone.

I'd like to clarify that older trucks, those from 1995 and before, that do not have electronic engines with speed limiters manufactured right in them will not need to retrofit those vehicles. In fact, more than 50% of Ontario trucks and 87% of the carriers in the US already have speed limiters in place and in use, and they're still able to deliver their goods on time. We do not believe that this will be a hindrance to cross-border trade and travel.

As for education on the new law, we're currently in a six-month educational awareness period. If pulled over, a trucker is informed that the new rules must be complied with by—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and it concerns the

Second Career program. Peter Zuccola from Nepean was laid off from his position as parts manager at a car dealership in October 2007. He applied to the government's Second Career program because he wanted to take a course in heating, refrigeration and air conditioning at Algonquin College so he could get back to work. In fact, he once had this qualification and he just needs to update his skills. It took Mr. Zuccola five months of paperwork before the ministry finally told him that they wouldn't help him get retrained because ministry officials apparently thought he would be better off finding a retail job, even after he showed them a letter from a heating and air conditioning employer who said they'd hire him so long as he completed the college course.

Why does this government consistently put up roadblocks that prevent people like Mr. Zuccola from getting the training assistance they need to get a good job in the trade of their choice?

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the member raising the concern about his constituent. As I've always said in this House, I'm very happy to look into individual cases that are brought forward.

I reject the second part of the honourable member's question when he talks about roadblocks and obstacles. The Second Career program is part of a menu of programs and services that are offered by Employment Ontario. I think we've seen a tremendous amount of success over the last eight months since the program was put in place. As the member knows, the Second Career program envisions 20,000 people going back for long-term training over the course of three years, and after approximately eight months we already have about 8,000 people who have come forward. But Second Career is only one of a variety of programs that exist through Employment Ontario. Through the skills development, a more short-term training program, over the last eight months we've seen 10,000 people come forward—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: The ministry has known about the problem for over a year. The minister should know. I know that when I was a minister, if something like this was going on, there would be something in that briefing book that would indicate that this is a problem that not only Mr. Zuccola is having, but hundreds of people are having in terms of the Second Career program.

The story goes on. Mr. Zuccola, after being rejected by the ministry, decided to take the college course anyway. He's paying \$9,000 for the course, even though he has no income. His wife, God bless her, is juggling several jobs to pay the bills and raise their child so that her husband can get the retraining he needs to get a job.

There's another twist. Mr. Zuccola sits next to a guy in his class who is being retrained through the Second Career program for the exact same qualifications. What an insult. There are thousands of Ontarians like Mr. Zuccola who are getting jerked around by this ministry and this government. They're not getting the retraining that has been promised through the \$4 million of advertising of this program—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. John Milloy: As I said, I'm very happy to look into the constituent that the honourable member brings forward. But I also have to impress upon this House that we've been very sensitive to removing obstacles through the Second Career program. In November of last year I announced a series of major changes to open up the Second Career program. Quite recently we changed the application form, and we continue to work with Employment Ontario providers to make sure that individuals have access to the training they need.

1130

Let me tell you about some good-news stories that I want to share. Rick was laid off from the manufacturing sector after 10 years. He applied for Second Career and is now enrolled in Niagara College's electrical engineering program. This is what he had to say: "For the first time in my life I was asked what I wanted to do for a career, instead of just finding work to provide for my family."

Amandeep Sandhra was laid off as an assembly operator at Chrysler. Second Career is providing funding for him to retrain for a job in the IT sector.

Robert, a 45-year-old, was laid off from his job as a general labourer at a small powder and painting company in London—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, your budget tomorrow may very well merge our provincial sales tax system into the much-hated Brian Mulroney-Michael Wilson federal GST system. When this happens, First Nations citizens who currently have an exemption to the PST will no longer have that exemption for items purchased off-reserve because the current GST rules will force them to pay that GST. Why would you increase the tax bill to some of the poorest citizens in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would urge my colleague to wait till tomorrow to hear what's in the budget. There will be a response.

Let me say what the Premier said earlier: It's about helping people through the challenges today and building the next generation of growth so that Ontario can again thrive and prosper.

My honourable colleague wants to represent his constituents. I recognize and respect that. I would ask him to wait till tomorrow afternoon and the question periods subsequent to that, and we can review any issues that come out of the budget, because we will lay out a plan that will see this economy through these difficult times and help grow Ontario in the future to produce new jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I do have to say, you have a funny way of defining what growth is, because what we've seen is exactly the opposite for the last four to five years.

So I ask you again—First Nations people are among the poorest people in this province. As I talk to chiefs and others across this province, they are concerned that this move will mean that their citizens living on-reserve who purchase goods off-reserve will now have to pay an additional 8%. Why would you whack them with another 8% tax, the very people who can least afford it? Give us a guarantee today.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, I would ask the member's patience till tomorrow at approximately 4 o'clock. In the interim, I would say that no government in the history of Ontario has done more to work with our First Nations peoples than the government of Dalton McGuinty. Whether it is creating a Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, whether it is investing in the health and education of our First Nations, whether it's investing in strategies to help lift our First Nations people out of poverty, no government, no party, in the history of this Legislature has done more than the government of Dalton McGuinty for our First Nations.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. In my riding of Ottawa Centre, renters are concerned about the cost of living. With high gas prices and a challenging economic outlook, they want to know that they will be protected. In communities like Ottawa—my constituents are working hard and playing by the rules. They want their government to be working hard for them.

Minister, under the previous government, the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal was known as an eviction machine that had no concern for tenants. I know this government passed the Residential Tenancies Act in 2006, but rents are still going up. How has the RTA helped tenants?

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me begin by thanking the honourable member, one of the strongest advocates for tenants in his community of Ottawa. He's not afraid to speak up for the tenants of Ottawa Centre and throughout the province of Ontario.

We're very proud, the McGuinty government, of the Residential Tenancies Act that came into effect in 2006, because it brings a balance back to the relationship between landlords and tenants. I'm also very pleased to report that after inheriting massive backlogs in the process, there are no backlogs. Every tenant now facing an eviction is afforded the benefit of a hearing. Landlords can evict problem tenants with more ease, and tenants in buildings with serious maintenance problems may apply for a freeze on rent increases. Municipalities now have the power to license landlords.

We're very proud of the Residential Tenancies Act, and I look forward to monitoring its progress in the years ahead.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: These changes will no doubt be of benefit for renters in my riding, but the reality is that most tenants and landlords never have to go to the

Landlord and Tenant Board. Most tenants pay the rent and most landlords take care of their properties. My concern is that rent continues to go up. I talk to young families and students who live on tight budgets. They rely on predictable expenses from year to year so they can maintain their standard of living. With the price of gas and home heating fuels on the rise, my constituents are paying more attention than ever to their bottom line.

The NDP wants to cap rent for two years to ensure that rent remains affordable. Minister, I want to know what the RTA does to ensure rent remains affordable. Is a rent cap the best way to ensure rents are affordable?

Hon. Jim Watson: A rent cap, in fact, would have a negative impact on the supply of rental properties throughout the province of Ontario, and the NDP plan would move landlord and tenant relations back to a more ideological, divisive era that really, quite frankly, did not work. We have brought a more balanced approach, which is the way to keep rent increases low and vacancy rates healthy. The annual rent increase guideline under the Residential Tenancies Act is now based on the consumer price index in the province of Ontario. The 2009 guideline was established at 1.8%, and it protects tenants from rent increases above the rate of inflation while allowing landlords to recover costs.

Let's take a quick look at the record. Rent increases under the Liberals have averaged 2.05%; under the Conservatives, 2.9%; under the NDP, 4.8%—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Premier. The EI numbers are out from Stats Canada, and they're not very pretty. Ontario numbers for EI benefits are up 43% since last year; that's nearly 55,000 more Ontarians who need assistance. In southwestern Ontario, the numbers are even uglier. In Windsor, the year-over-year increase on EI dependence is a staggering 82%; in London, Hamilton and Kitchener, 70%. Toronto EI claims are up 48%.

Of course, all this relates to our struggling manufacturing sector and the immense job losses we have seen, especially in southwestern Ontario. The Premier has consistently said, "Don't look at me. It's not my responsibility." That's okay in a political tactic, but as leadership, it stinks. There are workers languishing across the province, Premier. If you don't see how that is your problem, then you will never find a solution. So I ask you, will you finally accept some responsibility for this rampant unemployment, along with our humongous increases in welfare?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: A few things: First of all, we are going to continue to accept responsibility to provide more support to our families to help them better weather this economic storm. We're going to accept more responsibility through our budget and give effect to our desire to strengthen this economy on a go-forward basis. Where

I would love to get the support of my colleague, both for the budget itself but beyond that, is together with his federal colleagues.

Workers in Ontario continue to suffer from discrimination. They're getting more than \$4,000 less by way of employment insurance supports than they would were they living as Canadians in other parts of the country. I would love to have his support on this particular score. I ask that he speak with his federal counterpart and see what he can do to ensure that together, we both stand up for Ontario workers.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Ted Arnott: Speaker, I rise on a point of privilege and would seek your ruling on what I would consider to be an important matter. In recent days, the government has been consciously and deliberately leaking budget contents, one a day, either by speaking directly to the media or to a select audience somewhere outside this place. They have been open about it, even brazen, and completely unapologetic. It appears to be part of a political strategy to seek favourable front-page news coverage every day in the leadup to the actual budget, which, as we know, is scheduled for tomorrow.

As you're well aware, budget secrecy is a longstanding parliamentary convention. In defence of this convention, I would want to quote two esteemed former members of this House who were subsequently elected Premier of Ontario, David Peterson and Bob Rae. Today they are the twin luminaries of the federal Liberal Party. They both spoke to this issue in May 1983, when it was raised as a point of privilege. Mr. Peterson, then the Leader of the Opposition, said this:

"We have to ask ourselves why we have secrecy surrounding a budget. It started with a king who wanted to preserve fairness, the lack of advantage to any of his commoners as a result of proposed changes in taxation. The purpose of secrecy was to tell all citizens at the same time what policies were to be changed so no one individual could take advantage.

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"Budget secrecy symbolizes that fairness, justice and the principle of respect for the Legislature and the privileges of the members therein."

Mr. Rae, who at that time was the leader of the NDP, said this: "The tradition with respect to the secrecy of the budget is crystal clear.... The importance of that should not be lost to you...."

"I want to make just one other point, Mr. Speaker. When you are considering this as a question of privilege, when you consider the basic test, which I suggest is, 'Has the work of any member of this Legislature been impeded, been prevented?' I say that it has. In the normal course of events, there would be a budget lockup, critics would be informed of the contents of the budget and we would be able to deal with those contents in an informed and reasoned way and to respond accordingly.

"Each and every member would be able, on the basis of equal information, to communicate with his con-

stituents on the contents of the budget. Members would be able to make whatever arguments, from different sides of the fence and from different points of view, they would with respect to the information that had been made available."

I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that both of these former Premiers of the province of Ontario were indeed correct in the arguments they were making on the issue of budget secrecy. For me, it is a matter of privilege.

On a somewhat related matter, I must inform the House that last night, at about 8 p.m., I was denied access to this chamber by security guards, one of whom was a member of our own legislative security service. I had to work late into the evening last night to get caught up at my desk and I remembered that I'd left a book in the chamber, so I wanted to come into the chamber and retrieve it. I was disappointed to be told that there was no way I would be allowed access to the chamber. I was told that the Minister of Finance and a small group of people were in the chamber. Looking through that window, it appeared that the minister was rehearsing his budget speech in the chamber while being critiqued and coached on his presentation by people who are sitting right here. I would never criticize the minister for wanting to put on a good show tomorrow and attempting to put his best foot forward when he announces an \$18-billion deficit, but I would suggest that members should have access to this chamber at all times. I rather doubt that if any member of the opposition asked to book the chamber, lock the doors and practise an upcoming speech, they would be granted permission to do so.

Surely all of us, elected by the people and representing our constituents, are here on an equal basis. I know that you, Mr. Speaker, in a previous ruling on budget secrecy made clear the rights accorded to each member when you stated, "These rights are extremely narrow and specific; for instance, the right to speak freely in this place or to attend here without obstruction." I would appreciate your ruling on this matter, if possible, before the budget is tabled in this House tomorrow.

I thank you, sir, for your attention to my point of privilege.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I'd like to speak to this point of privilege. As the member for Wellington-Halton Hills is fully aware, the matter of budget secrecy is not an issue of privilege. A budget outlines the fiscal details of the government, with specific ministry allocations. The government is able to announce policy decisions at any time. In fact, the opposition asks us daily for the contents of the budget. We understand that the budgetary issues will be announced tomorrow. It is the government's policy to speed up the Ontario child benefit. It is the government's policy that was announced to invest in affordable housing retrofits and new units. It is new government policy that was announced to invest in our infrastructure, transit, hospitals and schools.

Every day in question period, the opposition parties ask for the government to outline its plan to deal with the economy, particularly in terms of the most vulnerable

and in terms of job creation. We have announced policy decisions to help low-income families by doubling the Ontario child benefit, by making affordable housing more energy-efficient and creating jobs in the process and building new units. And we're creating 300,000 jobs in construction, engineering and design with new infrastructure investments.

When it comes to budget secrecy, it is largely predicated on the principle that you cannot leak information that someone can use to benefit from personally before the budget is announced. Those are largely tax measures. There is no opportunity for personal gain or benefit from the policy decisions that we've recently announced. The budget will be presented in the Legislature on Thursday.

As my colleague did refer to, this issue has come before this Parliament and various Parliaments many times, and every ruling has been clear. In Monpetit and Marleau, on page 753, it states, "Speakers of the Canadian House have maintained that secrecy is a matter of parliamentary convention, rather than one of privilege." And referring to the Speaker's ruling of May 9, 1983—the member for Wellington-Halton Hills referred to submissions; he did not actually refer to the Speaker's ruling. So, to the member from Wellington-Halton Hills, I would just turn you to the Speaker's ruling on May 9, 1983, when he ruled on a question of privilege concerning a budget leak.

Speaker Turner stated: "Budget secrecy is a political convention, as is the practice that the Treasurer presents his budget in the House before discussing it in any other public forum. It has nothing to do with parliamentary privilege." And further on, "although it is a courtesy to the assembly for a minister to release information in the assembly before releasing it to the press or the public, it is not a breach of the privileges ... of the assembly if this does not happen." Speaker Turner concluded that the presentation of the budget was not a matter that fell under any collective or individual privilege.

There have been a number of rulings, and I would refer the Speaker to Speaker Fraser's ruling on June 18, 1987, and again Speaker Parent in 1997. But I would also just like to draw the attention of the House to a ruling by Speaker Carr on May 8, 2003. You may recall this ruling, as I believe you were in the House at the time. Speaker Carr at that time, May 8, 2003, spoke as follows:

"Having outlined the meaning of 'privilege,' I want to refer to the May 9, 1983, precedent in which Speaker Turner ruled on a question of privilege concerning a budget leak. The Speaker made the following ruling, which can be found at pages 38 and 39 of the Journals for that day:

'Budget secrecy is a political convention as is the practice that the Treasurer presents his budget in the House before discussing it in any other public forum. It has nothing to do with parliamentary privilege.'

I would also draw to the attention of members of this House a vote on a motion by the official opposition House Leader, Sean Conway, dated Wednesday May 21, 2003, and I'm quoting from Hansard. "The Speaker: Mr. Conway has moved that this House declares that it is the

undoubted right of the Legislative Assembly, in Parliament assembled, to be the first recipient of the budget of Ontario." In that vote, which was a recorded vote, 53 members of the official opposition, not all of whom are sitting here today, including 15 who are here in the Legislature today, voted against that motion, and I would note that the member for Wellington-Halton Hills was one of those members.

Those are our submissions on this point of privilege.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Timmins-James Bay on the point of privilege.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I am distressed by what we find out in regard to the chamber being blocked yesterday as far as access to all members. I would ask you, as you deliberate on this particular item, to really turn your attention to this in a very serious way, because no member of the assembly should, at any time, be barred from having access to this chamber. If we get into the practice where the government can come in and practise their speeches, as was said earlier, is it incumbent, then, upon the opposition to do the same? This chamber is a place for debate, and it's a place to bring issues before the Speaker, not for us to practise our speeches.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Newmarket-Aurora on the same point of privilege.

Mr. Frank Klees: Particularly with regard to my colleague's reference to the rehearsal that was going on in here last night, there are some further implications to what transpired. If, in fact, the minister was rehearsing his budget speech, I would suggest to you that this is a very serious issue. The budget speech and the information contained therein should, in fact, be presented for the first time in this place in the presence of all members. As my colleague indicated, there were other people in this place. We don't know who they were. We don't know if they were outside consultants; we don't know what information was then delivered to those individuals. Is it possible that the individuals who were present in the chamber while they heard that speech delivered could use that information for personal gain, as the House leader indicated? These are all issues that I suggest you, Speaker, have a responsibility to fully investigate and then to report back to the House and take whatever action may be necessary flowing from that information.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the member from Wellington-Halton Hills for the notice that he provided and thank the government House leader, the member from Timmins-James Bay and the member from Newmarket-Aurora for their comments. I will deal with both issues. I will reserve decision at this time.

But I think it's important to say to the second point that was raised in the point of privilege and responded to by the member from Timmins-James Bay and the member from Newmarket-Aurora that it has been a long-standing practice within this chamber—that goes back over governments of all stripes—to allow the Minister of Finance access to this chamber in advance, either on an evening or, in some cases, it has been noted that that access has been granted on a Sunday afternoon. But I will

address the issue. I will speak with the Sergeant at Arms to review the report of the security officer who would have met the honourable member in the chamber in the evening.

This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1151 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Mike Colle: It gives me great pleasure to welcome the consul general of the amazing country of the Philippines. The consul general, Alejandro B. Mosquera, is here with us today. Welcome.

Also in the Speaker's gallery along with the consul general are members from the Filipino community: Pura Velasco, Flor Dandal, Mel Castre, Virgilio Cabillan and Milagros Echevaria. I would like to welcome them.

Mr. John O'Toole: I have three individuals I'd like to introduce and recognize. They may not be here just yet; I'm waiting.

Andrew Galloro is a young student at the University of Toronto who has joined me to help me become more effective in the Legislature; it'll be a daunting task.

The other two are constituents of mine who are here today. In fact, they're here on behalf of the deadstock issue and the minister's failure to respond. One is Bert Werry, who is a leader in the agricultural community in the riding of Durham. I'm sure Steve Peters, the Speaker, knows Mr. Werry.

Harvey Graham is the past president of the Ontario Cattlemen's Association and the Canadian Cattlemen's Association. I hope he joins us here this afternoon.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to take this opportunity to welcome guests that are coming into the chamber as we speak, students from the Regina Mundi school in the great riding of Elgin-Middlesex-London. The grade 10 students are here visiting Toronto and visiting Queen's Park. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

I just want to remind members who may be here in the chamber or in their offices working with their televisions on in the background that there's a retirement celebration taking place today for Karyn Leonard from the IPRB. Karyn has been a good friend to all of us over the years. There's a reception honouring Karyn and to say thank you to Karyn this evening from 4:30 to 6:30 in the Speaker's apartment. I welcome all members and staff to join us and say thank you to Karyn for her great efforts.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: Another McGuinty budget leak reported by the old, reliable Toronto Star on March 24, 2009, announced \$27.5 billion in Ontario capital spending over the next two years.

Over three years ago, Premier McGuinty told the Record newspaper that Cambridge Memorial Hospital would get its funding for the expansion: "I've always said it's not a question of 'if,' but 'when'...." Over three years ago, Minister Smitherman echoed an identical promise. Minister Milloy's website refers to Cambridge Memorial: "I am heartened that both the Premier and the Minister of Health have both said it's not a question of 'if' but 'when' the project can proceed."

On behalf of the residents of Cambridge and North Dumfries, I again ask this very simple question as I asked it of Premier McGuinty on March 22, 2009: When will your government allow the long-promised expansion at Cambridge Memorial Hospital to proceed? He wouldn't answer. So if you're expecting provincial funding of \$27.5 billion to help your pressing infrastructure needs and create jobs during the next two years, make sure you don't get the old McGuinty gambit: "The cheque is in the mail."

DEVELOPMENT IN TORONTO-DANFORTH

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Today is a day of celebration in my riding. Tonight the East Toronto Community Coalition is celebrating the March 4 victory at the Ontario Municipal Board against SmartCentres. SmartCentres had wanted to put a shopping mall in the south end of my riding in an area that is protected for employment, an area that is host to a substantial part of Toronto's film community. If, in fact, SmartCentres had gone ahead, it would have undermined industry in my area, particularly the film industry. It would have been another example of, another bastion of, car-dependent sprawl.

This development has been opposed over the years by the city councillor in the area, Paula Fletcher, and by the East Toronto Community Coalition. Along with Jack Layton, the member of Parliament, and myself, we were very happy to support them. They did an excellent job.

This community should not have had to go through this fight. This provincial government should have been on their side from the beginning. They've stated repeatedly that they're against car-dependent sprawl, but in fact, when someone proposed a sprawl-generating kind of development, they didn't oppose it; they stood silent; they stood by. That was wrong; it still is wrong. Nonetheless, even without the provincial government's help, the community and the city won through and had a very important victory this month. They deserve an excellent evening of celebration today.

EASTER SEALS MONTH

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: March is Easter Seals Month all over Canada. There are over 200,000 children, youth and young adults living with a physical disability in Ontario. For more than 85 years, Easter Seals Ontario has helped these people achieve their full potential and eventually their independence.

Easter Seals Ontario works with children who suffer from a variety of disabilities, including cerebral palsy, spina bifida or those suffering from the devastating effects of brain injuries or meningitis.

First introduced in 1947 to Ontario, the Easter Seals campaign throughout the month of March initially raised a staggering \$138,396. In 2007, the same campaign raised more than \$2 million.

I want to congratulate Easter Seals Ontario on all of the good work they have done and will continue to do for children living with disabilities.

DEADSTOCK INDUSTRY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: "Improper disposal of deadstock poses risks to environmental quality, animal health (in terms of contagious diseases and biosecurity) and public health, which includes the farm family." That quote was from an engineer in the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. It's on the ministry's own website. He recognizes the significant danger created when farmers can't properly dispose of dead animals, and yet that is exactly the situation that the Minister of Agriculture has created.

Since 2003, deadstock collectors have relied on government support to make it economically viable to pick up and safely dispose of carcasses, but the Minister of Agriculture cut that funding without a plan in place to deal with the deadstock. Farmers and deadstock collectors are here today on the front lawn to tell the minister that this cannot wait and that the answer is not more red tape regulations. It cannot be options that farmers simply can't afford.

If the minister would just listen to the deadstock collectors, she would know that they have been forced to raise their price dramatically because she cut funding. If she listened to the farmers, she would know they can't afford to suddenly pay two or three times the price to dispose of their dead animals.

The deadstock collectors have told me that the number of animals they are picking up has decreased dramatically, and it is not because the number of animals dying has changed. They are here today to say they need funding restored immediately. They need this government to take action to ensure that they don't have a health and environmental disaster in this province.

EDUCATION

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Last week, I was fortunate to meet with Michelle Gable, a 20-year-old Londoner who is working hard to make a better life for herself. She is getting a real hand up from Jane Lucas and Ralph Hackbarth, teachers with the Reconnect program of London-Middlesex. Reconnect targets disengaged youth who left school without graduating. It has helped get them back on track. Reconnect was launched in 2005 and receives funding from the Ontario Ministry of Education. Four teachers and two counsellors deliver the program

with support from community partners, including nurses from the local health unit.

I would like to share what student Michelle Gable had to say about Reconnect. She wrote: "This program and these teachers have saved my life. I don't know where I would be without them and the program, but I know it would not be good or even a successful road to go down."

I know every member of this House will join with me in wishing Michelle great success as she works hard toward her goal of attending university and also of being a constructive person in the community. I would also like to thank Jane Lucas, Ralph Hackbarth and their colleagues for their hard work and dedication in supporting students who are, for some reason, unable to continue their education. It's very important for all of us to support students who want to continue their education.

1510

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Toby Barrett: I was disheartened last night to read malicious remarks about myself in this House, spoken by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Where I come from, you don't settle differences with attempts to embarrass. If the minister has a problem with me personally, I invite him to see me afterwards.

I would also be very happy to do another tour of the flooded areas, so that this time the minister could see for himself the damage the Grand River flooding has done throughout my riding.

I do thank both the member from Brant and the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook for setting the record straight yesterday in the House; I was not here. We do all work together on the Grand. We work with Mayor Trainer and Haldimand Councillor Lorne Boyko.

It's no secret that government announcements are not made by an opposition MPP. Therefore, the neighbouring government MPP made the disaster relief announcement. I now look forward to the minister providing adequate funding for both Cayuga and the Dunnville area.

Next time, I feel that the minister should think twice before he drags my name through the mud. It's clear that he embarrassed himself and embarrassed his colleagues more so than me, when a more professional, positive approach, I feel, would have been much more appropriate.

YORK UNIVERSITY

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I rise to recognize and mark the 50th anniversary of York University tomorrow, March 26—an extraordinary institution whose diversity, innovation and excellence have emerged with remarkable speed over these last five decades. One of Canada's best educational success stories, from an initial class of 76 students in 1960, York has evolved into the second-largest university in Ontario and the third-largest in Canada, attracting over 50,000 students.

It was here in the Legislature in 1959 that Premier Leslie Frost, Minister John Robarts and subsequently

Minister Bill Davis passed the York University Act, creating a different approach to education based on a foundation of interdisciplinary thinking, teaching and research. In 50 years, York has grown into a world-renowned teaching and research institution. Alumni numbering over 210,000 strong across the GTA and in 145 countries include many of the honourable members here today, as well as fellow past members of the Legislature.

We look forward to watching York evolve and continue to meet the needs of future generations. We look forward to York playing a critical part in the cultural, social, educational and economic development of our local and global communities. I trust you will join me and my colleague, Mario Sergio, MPP for York West, in celebrating this important milestone in York's history.

GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: On March 25, Greeks around the world celebrate Greek Independence Day. It marks two very significant events that are central to Greek history, culture and faith. First, it marks the Annunciation of the Theotokos, the day that the Archangel Gabriel revealed to Mary that she would bear a child. Second, it marks the beginning of the Greek War of Independence in 1821, which eventually led to the birth of the modern state of Greece.

March 25 is celebrated across the world as a reminder of the rich history that binds Greek communities everywhere. It honours the divine mystery of the Incarnation, revered in the Orthodox faith, while celebrating the values of self-governance, justice and freedom. It is also an opportunity to share Greek heritage with others.

Ontario is fortunate to have strong Greek communities, which have become an important part of our cultural fabric. As the proud daughter of Greek immigrants and a proud Hamiltonian, I look forward to celebrating this important Greek tradition at home. In fact, today, the Greek flag has been raised at Queen's Park. We had several people join us here to celebrate Greek Independence Day, and I want to thank the many guests from Toronto and Hamilton: the Consul General of Greece, Mr. Dimitris Azemopoulos; the president of the Greek Community of Toronto, Mr. Costas Menegakis; and the president of the Pan-Macedonian Association of Hamilton, Mr. Aristotle Damianopoulos. I have to say, "Zito É Ellas, Zito O Canada."

JACK BURKHOLDER

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's with some sadness that I rise in the House today to inform the House about the passing this week of an icon in Oakville politics and the charitable world. Earlier this week saw the passing of Jack Burkholder at the age of 81. Those of you who knew Jack or anybody who came in contact with Jack would know that he was just an absolute marketing wizard. He put those skills that he had to good use not only in the business world but certainly with everybody

that he touched in the Oakville community, whether it be in a political sense or whether it be in a charitable sentence.

The work that he did as an individual for the hospital is something I think our community owes a great deal of gratitude for. Those of you who are old enough to remember the slogan “a tiger in your tank” should also know that it was Jack Burkholder who came up with that slogan. It’s something that I think has certainly survived the test of time.

Jack leaves behind a wonderful family. He was the proud husband of Joan for a number of years, father of Bari, father of Ian and a grandfather of many. He was just a wonderful man who touched the lives of so many people. A little later in his life he suffered a stroke, but it didn’t stop him a bit; he just kept marching right on.

He was a friend of the former mayor of Oakville, Harry Barrett; they were two chums who were just inseparable. He was a friend to everybody in Oakville. He’s mourned by many, and he’s going to be missed by so many people.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CAREGIVER AND FOREIGN WORKER RECRUITMENT AND PROTECTION ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE RECRUTEMENT ET LA PROTECTION DES FOURNISSEURS DE SOINS ET DES TRAVAILLEURS ÉTRANGERS

Mr. Colle moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 160, An Act respecting the recruitment and protection of caregivers and foreign workers / Projet de loi 160, Loi ayant trait au recrutement et à la protection des fournisseurs de soins et des travailleurs étrangers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Mike Colle: I would like to mention that there are some guests here—they weren’t here when I made the announcement—who were very instrumental in getting this bill to this House: the Consul General of the Philippines, Alejandro B. Mosquera, Pura Velasco, Flor Dandal, Mel Castre, Virgilio Cabillan and Milagros Echevaria. Thank you for being here.

This bill, if passed, will regulate and license persons who operate caregiver agency recruitment businesses and ensure that our caregivers are protected under Ontario law to ensure that they can continue to give their work and their care to so many of our citizens and live in dignity as they work here in Ontario.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. Brad Duguid: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding committee meeting times.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I move that, notwithstanding the order of the House of May 1, 2008, respecting meeting times for committees, the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly be authorized to meet in the afternoon of Wednesday, April 1, and Wednesday, April 8, 2009, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., in addition to its regularly scheduled meeting time.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

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COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. Brad Duguid: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding committee membership.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I move that the following changes be made to the membership of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies: that Mr. Hillier be replaced by Mr. Martiniuk.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

MINING INDUSTRY

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I am very pleased to alert and remind the members of the House that it is Meet the Miners Day here in Queen’s Park. Today, the Ontario Mining Association is holding several activities in our legislative buildings, including a full meeting of its board of directors this morning, meetings with ministers and members of all parties this afternoon, and expert presentations on economic issues which took place over the lunch hour. I know that the Ontario Mining Association chair George Flumerfelt, president of the Redpath Group, and Mining Association president Chris Hodgson, a former member of this Legislature and, of course, formerly Minister of Northern Development and Mines, will be also visiting us here in the Legislature today. We’re glad to have them here.

Later this evening, we are inviting members to join the OMA and other industry leaders at their Meet the Miners

reception and social in the legislative dining room between 5:30 and 7:30 p.m. There, I hope we can chat informally about mutual concerns and learn more about this vital industry's contributions to the province—and those contributions are most impressive.

Many of us know that the mineral industry has made this city, Toronto, one of the most important financial capitals in the world, but the industry's impact reaches far beyond the stock exchange. In fact, this industry contributed more than \$9.6 billion in production values last year. It directly employed more than 23,000 people, and an estimated 25,000 people worked in the mining supply and service sector, while another 50,000 were employed in metal fabrication activities. At the same time, the industry's spending on exploration and deposit appraisal soared to a record \$667 million.

Ontario's mineral industry seemed headed for another record this year when its fortunes were suddenly reversed by global financial upheaval. So instead of enjoying a period of sustained expansion, the mineral industry is now facing some very challenging times.

Certainly, while the current turmoil in the global economy is worrisome for us all, I firmly believe that the future of the mineral industry in Ontario looks very bright. The fact is, mining people have seen these sudden reversals many times before, and they have always faced them with resiliency. The remarkable thing about the leaders in the mining sector is that they always respond with optimism and unquenchable hope. I'm very confident that our miners will bounce back stronger than ever when the world financial situation stabilizes and emerging economies begin to rekindle their growth.

May I say to all members of the Legislature that our modernization of the Mining Act, which we launched last August, is one way Ontario is preparing for that resurgence. Through this modernization process, we're bringing the Mining Act into harmony with the values of today's society while very strongly maintaining a framework that supports the mineral industry's contribution to Ontario's economy. Certainly, it is a difficult task that requires us to reconcile many diverse viewpoints, but it is also a task that is vital to the future of our industry, our communities and our environment.

That is particularly true in northern Ontario, which I represent. The north is home to all 27 of our metal mines. It hosts Ontario's first diamond mine—the same mine, of course, that is the source of the two beautiful stones that grace our newly refurbished mace. Once again, Mr. Speaker, thank you for helping make that extraordinary historic experience yesterday so wonderful. It's in the north where the bulk of mineral exploration does take place. In addition, First Nations communities, particularly those in remote communities of Ontario's far north, are watching very closely to ensure that their futures will be protected and enhanced by mineral sector activity.

So as we draft legislation which we plan to introduce during this session, we are aware that, indeed, the stakes are high. We also agree that we have to get it right, and that's exactly our intention. We are very much relying on

extensive input from aboriginal communities and their organizations. We are also looking for input, of course, from industry, mining municipalities and other key stakeholders to steer us in the right direction. We've had an extraordinary, virtually unprecedented consultation process.

Drawing on those five months of consultations—which were preceded, by the way, by other discussions that took place, but drawing on the five months of formal consultations—our proposals will very much reflect the views of approximately 1,000 individuals and organizations, certainly including the minerals industry, environmental groups, municipalities and private citizens. They will very much, as well, reflect the input of aboriginal organizations and approximately 100 First Nation communities who were consulted through a very comprehensive process that included workshops and community meetings across the province—again, a very positive process.

The fact is that throughout the modernization process, we have held to one watchword, and I've talked about it a great deal. That word is "balance." In my view, that is the only way that we can achieve our social and economic goals while continuing to promote a healthy and vital mineral industry. I very much strongly believe that our proposals will strengthen Ontario's mineral industry and provide new opportunities for growth, particularly in our northern, rural and aboriginal communities.

So I invite all members to join me this evening at the Meet the Miners reception. I can assure you that you will be meeting some amazing Ontarians. You will also have a chance to learn how much this remarkable industry contributes to Ontario's well-being and prosperity.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the statement made by the Minister of Northern Development and Mines today on the annual Meet the Miners Day.

I'm certainly delighted to recognize representatives from the mining industry and the Ontario Mining Association who are visiting here today at Queen's Park. I look forward, with the leader of the PC Party, Bob Runciman, to the meeting with the miners that will happen shortly, after I leave the Legislature in a few minutes.

I'd certainly like to welcome Chris Hodgson, the president of the OMA, and George Flumerfelt, the chair of the OMA, who are here today. We could have used Chris Hodgson in the recent MP-MPP hockey game we had at the Air Canada Centre a couple of weeks ago, or better still his son Cody, who would have been a real improvement to the quality on the MPPs' hockey team.

I do remember last year at the Meet the Miners reception where the representatives were doing their best to be polite, but still had to make the government very aware of the fact that just as the Attawapiskat mine, the Victor mine, was about to open, the government decided

to change the rules of the game and triple the taxation rate on diamond mining in the province. As I say, the reception was generally quite cordial and they were doing their best to be polite, but they had to make the government aware of the fact that it's just not fair to change the rules in the game after companies invested a billion dollars in our province.

Ontario mines are very important to the economy of this province. Ontario mines are home to a long list of valuable minerals: copper, gold, zinc, nickel, and more recently diamonds. I would like to thank De Beers for the diamonds they donated to our mace. They certainly enhance the mace and give it added meaning here at the Ontario Legislature. I thank De Beers for donating those quality Ontario diamonds to Ontario's mace.

Ontario is a leader when it comes to mineral production. In 2008, Ontario yielded 47% of Canada's nickel production, 53% of Canada's gold production, 31% of Canada's copper production, and 84% of Canada's platinum group metals production. In addition, Ontario has been the leading jurisdiction in Canada for mineral exploration and deposit appraisal expenditures since 2000, accounting for some 23.5% in 2008. It is especially vital in these tough economic times that the government continue to support the mining industry to ensure that it remains competitive and that it continues to thrive in Ontario.

When the PC Party was in power, we clearly understood the importance of the mining industry, and this was reflected in a number of initiatives that were introduced and that supported mining in Ontario. In fact, at that time we were rated the number one spot in the world, the number one country in the world to invest in mining. We had programs like, in 1999, Operation Treasure Hunt that invested \$19 million to help increase mineral exploration in the province. We had another program with flow-through shares that stimulated investment in mining. We had \$8 million in the 2000 budget for the new Ontario mineral exploration technology program, which encouraged the development of new mining technologies in Ontario, and there was money toward enhancing mine safety and rehabilitation of former mine sites. Lastly, the party established regulations for the geoscience professions. This ensured that individuals operating in those professions were qualified, which has instilled public confidence in the industry. So it's clear that the PC Party in the past has been very supportive of mining and has recognized its importance.

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We have the review of the Mining Act happening right now, and I hope the government gets this right. They talk about balance, and I would agree that's very important. It's just so important to get this act right, so that especially in these tough economic times we don't do things to make our province less competitive for this vital industry that is so important, particularly in the north and particularly for our First Nations communities.

I would again like to welcome the representatives of the Ontario Mining Association and the mining industry here to Queen's Park. I look forward to going to the

reception a little bit later and hope that no more new surprises are thrown on the industry this year. I will be listening carefully to the speeches that are made at the Meet the Miners reception this afternoon.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I stand in a bit of a unique position, along with my friend Mr. Kormos, as being probably the only people who actually worked in an operating mine. I worked underground for some 10 years as an electrician for the Noranda group, eventually the Royal Oak group. I know that my good friend Mr. Kormos worked in the copper mines of British Columbia as a grease monkey, as I used to call it back then, working in the open pit of the Granisle. So mining for us, as New Democrats, is not just a really important economic activity; it is also something that a number of us have had to work at as a profession.

I've got to say that my time in mining was a really good time. Mining is not what people think it is. People have the impression of mining that it's dark, dingy and dangerous, and has all these nasty things associated with it. But I can tell you that although the workplace is a place where you always need to be aware of what's going on around you, be it working in a mill, an open pit or underground, much has been done to improve the health and safety of workers in the province of Ontario.

I'm quite proud to have been a member of a government, when the NDP was in power from 1990 to 1995, and more importantly, a proud Steelworker who moved a long way to deal with making the workplace safer for workers in the mining industry of Ontario. It was our union, the United Steelworkers of America, that made the changes and pushed and eventually got the first Occupational Health and Safety Act in the province of Ontario in the early 1980s. It was also my union, the United Steelworkers of America, and myself along with Omer Séguin and Mo Sheppard, and others, who finally got lung cancer, recognized as an industrial disease as a result of working underground. All those things have led to a safer work environment.

Today, I think the mining industry has learned, from what has happened in the past, that you need to provide a safe working environment for the people in your employ. Employers today try a lot harder than they used to in the past to make sure that workers are able to go to work in the morning, know that they can give a full day of work and, at the end of the day, be able to go home and be fairly sure they're not going to be involved in an accident or be diseased as a result of working underground.

So I come from a different perspective.

The mining industry is important to the communities I come from. The city of Timmins is, I would argue, the premier mining area of Ontario. We are currently one of the few communities in Ontario experiencing a little bit of a boom. We've got two other gold mines that are opening up, one just outside of Timmins, Lake Shore Gold, and we've also got Detour Lake, of all places, that is about to go back into production.

Here's a really good story. I was a member of the government when Shelley Martel was Minister of Northern Development and Mines, and did the mine reclamation act. As a result of the mine reclamation act, operating mines have to put money aside so that when the mine shuts down, they're able to reclaim the ground so it looks as close to what it used to prior to the mine being put into production.

I was there when Detour Lake was first opened. In fact, I was one of the people—I'm an electronics technician by trade—who went up to set up the telecommunications system that was at the exploration camp at Detour Lake before there ever was a mine. I was a Steelworker and worked on the organizing drive to organize the workers at Detour Lake, but I was also the MPP who got a chance to work with Detour when they were still in operation, and was the MPP when it was taken out of commission.

Here is the really good story: That mine operated for about 12 to 14 years, and eventually, when it did shut down, the entire site was reclaimed. I've brought Michael Prue and Andrea Horwath and other members on trips up to Moosonee on my plane, and I always make a point of flying over the Detour Lake gold mine and saying, "Can you see the mine?" And they go, "Where? What do you mean? Where's the mine?" I say, "Right underneath us; there's a mine here." And they say, "I can't see it. There's nothing but trees and grass." I say, "Exactly."

The mine reclamation act says that you put money aside and, when you shut down, you take down the buildings, you reclaim the land and you bring it back to what it looked like. If you fly over those sites today, you wouldn't even know there was a mine that operated there, contrary to what we saw at the Kamiskotia mine, the old copper mine up at Kamiskotia Lake, which is just in behind my cottage. We're still having to pay for the environmental disasters—some \$50 million now.

The interesting story is that Detour Lake is going to go back online. In fact, a good friend of mine is going there—I'm not going to mention names—somebody who, we both know, is going to be one of the key principals when it comes to bringing that mine online. But here we are, going through the cycle yet again.

I know that there's a great future for Ontario when it comes to mining. We've had some bumps along the road. I can point a finger at this government when it comes to diamond royalties; I tell you, there were some really upset people in the diamond industry. But Ontario has the best geology and the best people. One of the best places to do business when it comes to operating a mine is here in Ontario, and we should be proud of that.

PETITIONS

SALES TAX

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition signed by hundreds of people. It's appropriate that we bring this in

today, before tomorrow's budget day. It's a petition to "Implement a Sales Tax Holiday for Vehicle Sales.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas federal and provincial governments have extended billions of dollars of loans to car manufacturers to stave off a financial crisis; and

"Whereas the survival of those companies depends not just on bailouts but on continuing to sell vehicles; and

"Whereas consumers are currently not purchasing vehicles in sufficient numbers to not only ensure jobs in the industry but stimulus for the economy;

"We, the undersigned, petition provincial and federal governments to implement a sales tax holiday on the purchase of new and used cars and trucks."

I support this petition, signed by many, many people in my riding and beyond, and I send it down with Noel.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition that's actually growing in numbers. This first signature is that of Cecile Bowers, who is very involved with the Legion in my riding. The petition reads as follows:

"Support for Lakeridge Health Bowmanville.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the municipality of Clarington passed resolution C-049-09 in support of Lakeridge Health Bowmanville; and

"Whereas area doctors, hospital staff and citizens have raised concerns that Bowmanville's hospital could turn into little more than a site to stabilize and transfer patients for treatment outside the municipality; and

"Whereas Clarington is a growing community of over 80,000 people; and

"Whereas we support the continuation of the Lakeridge Bowmanville site through access to on-site services, including emergency room, internal medicine and general surgery;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the McGuinty government take the necessary actions to fund our hospitals equally and fairly. And furthermore, we request that the clinical services plan of the Central East LHIN—that's the local health integration network—"address the need for the Bowmanville hospital to continue to offer a complete range of services appropriate for the growing community of Clarington."

I'm pleased to sign this and support it and present it to one of the pages, Mark.

PROPERTY TAXATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm glad to present this petition whereby I add 650 names to a petition I have presented already. It goes as follows:

"Whereas 2009 is a reassessment year in the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas the assessments will be phased in over a four-year period from 2009 to 2012; and

"Whereas the assessed values for current value assessments collected as at January 1, 2008, were obtained during years of high real estate activity in the province of Ontario; and

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"Whereas the downturn in the current global economic climate has greatly affected the real estate market, and subsequently, the assessed values in the province of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Finance for the province of Ontario roll back assessed values to the base year of January 1, 2005."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the clerks' table with page Victoria.

DENTAL CARE

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I have a petition that provided to me by Pam MacDougall, health promoter from the great municipality of Port Hope. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas unresolved oral health problems have a negative impact on a child's growth, development and ability to learn at school, an adult's ability to gain and maintain viable employment, and a senior's ability to eat nutritious foods and socialize with peers; and

"Whereas the consequence of unresolved oral health problems can negatively influence our economy through related medical costs and the compromised employability of people with dental problems; and

"Whereas the Ontario government made a commitment to invest \$135 million over three years in a dental program for low-income Ontarians as part of the provincial poverty reduction strategy; and

"Whereas the Ontario Oral Health Alliance is encouraged by the government's pledge to improve the oral health of Ontarians and reduce poverty in the province;

"We, the undersigned, petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately take the steps necessary to rapidly implement the above-mentioned dental health program for low-income Ontarians."

I will have page Emily deliver it to the desk.

SALES TAX

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with the auto industry sent to me from Bayview Chevrolet Pontiac Buick in Parry Sound. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the auto industry in Ontario and throughout North America is experiencing a major restructuring; and

"Whereas the current economic crisis is affecting the auto manufacturers and the front-line dealerships throughout Ontario; and

"Whereas many potential automobile purchasers are having difficulty accessing credit even at current prices; and

"Whereas a three-month tax holiday of the PST on the purchase of new cars and trucks would stimulate auto sales;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario implement a three-month PST holiday on new vehicle purchases and that the Ontario Minister of Finance include this PST holiday in the next provincial budget."

I support this petition.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: "Whereas Cambridge Memorial Hospital and other hospitals in the Waterloo region are experiencing substantial increased demands due to population growth; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government's freeze on new long-term-care facilities has resulted in additional long-term-care patients in our hospitals; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government's cuts to hospital funding have resulted in a dangerous environment for patients and staff in Cambridge and across Ontario; and

"Whereas the approved new expansion of the hospital has been delayed by the McGuinty government and this has contributed to the funding shortfall;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That the McGuinty government meet its obligations to introduce a population-needs-based funding formula for hospitals as has been done in other Canadian provinces;

"(2) That the McGuinty government proceed immediately with the approved new expansion of Cambridge Memorial Hospital."

As I support this petition, I affix my name thereto.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I have a petition on behalf of residents of Sarnia-Lambton.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas nutritious food is essential for good health;

"Whereas the county of Lambton's community health services department's 2008 nutritious food basket report shows that food prices have increased 25.6% since 2000;

"Whereas low social assistance rates in Ontario are inadequate to meet the nutritional needs of adults and children;

"Whereas a single person in receipt of Ontario Works only receives \$216 a month for all of their clothing, personal hygiene products, transportation, food and all other basic needs, and a single disabled person in receipt of Ontario disability support program benefits only receives \$566 a month for all of their clothing, personal hygiene products, transportation, food and all other basic needs, including disability related needs; and

"Whereas single and two-parent low-income families cannot afford to nutritiously feed their children or

themselves due to the high cost of healthy food and the high cost of shelter and other basic necessities; and

"Whereas the ill effects of poor nutrition on physical and mental health, learning, growth and development are well documented;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately introduce a \$100-per-month healthy food supplement in the spring 2009 budget to be added to the basic needs allowance for all adults receiving social assistance. This supplement will assist as a start in closing the monthly gap of food deficiency, while reducing the negative health effects of poverty."

Thank you. I'll give it to Daphnée.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario is introducing a policy of forcing sole proprietors, partners, executive officers in a corporation and independent operators in construction to pay workers' compensation premiums on their own earnings in addition to the premiums they already pay on behalf of their employees; and

"Whereas such a policy will inflict an additional \$11,000 average cost on law-abiding business owners in the above-ground economy while doing nothing to root out the law-evading cheaters in the underground economy; and

"Whereas such a policy will not improve access to workplace health and safety education and training since law-abiding businesses already have access to all of these resources and law-evading businesses will continue to hide; and

"Whereas such a policy is not needed to level the playing field, since the rules already require that firms large and small must cover employees, while company leaders are exempt in both cases; and

"Whereas there has been no serious review of alternatives such as tracking who has coverage by name to limit abuse and other insurance options; and

"Whereas such a policy could be extended beyond construction to other sectors; and

"Whereas Ontario's slowing economy is hurting citizens and businesses, also resulting in Ontario becoming a first-time 'have-not' province;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To vote against or repeal any legislation that requires independent operators, executive officers in a corporation, sole proprietors and partners in construction or in any other sector to pay WSIB premiums on their own earnings."

I agree with this petition and I will affix my name thereto and give it to page Sean.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition here in support of Bill 160, the bill to stop the exploitation of vulnerable foreign workers.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas a number of foreign worker and caregiver recruitment agencies have exploited vulnerable foreign workers; and

"Whereas foreign workers are subject to illegal fees and abuse at the hands of some of these unscrupulous recruiters; and

"Whereas the federal government in Ottawa has failed to protect foreign workers from these abuses; and

"Whereas, in Ontario, the former Conservative government deregulated and eliminated protection for foreign workers; and

"Whereas a great number of foreign workers and caregivers perform outstanding and difficult tasks on a daily basis in their work, with limited protection;

"We, the undersigned, support MPP Mike Colle's Bill, the Caregiver and Foreign Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, 2009, and urge its speedy passage into law."

I support the foreign workers and affix my name to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition from my riding of Durham. I'm getting so many of these petitions that I certainly am impressed with the support by the community. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the municipality of Clarington passed resolution C-049-09 in support of Lakeridge Health Bowmanville; and

"Whereas area doctors, hospital staff and citizens have raised concerns that Bowmanville's hospital could turn into little more than a site to stabilize and transfer patients for treatment outside the municipality; and

"Whereas Clarington is a growing community of over 80,000; and

"Whereas we support the continuation of the Lakeridge Bowmanville site through access to on-site services, including emergency room, internal medicine and general surgery;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the McGuinty government take the necessary actions to fund our hospitals equally and fairly. And furthermore, we request that the clinical services plan of the Central East LHIN address the need for the Bowmanville hospital to continue to offer a complete range of services appropriate for the growing community of Clarington."

Laurie Madder is the constituent who is the first signature on this petition.

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PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition from the good men and women that work with Bob Kinnear and the Amalgamated Transit Union.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas too many innocent people are being victimized by acts of violence while using public transit; and

"Whereas too many public transit employees are being victimized by acts of violence while working to serve the public; and

"Whereas we need to send a strong message of zero tolerance for violence on public transit; and

"Whereas anyone harming or carrying a weapon on public transit should be dealt with by the full force of the law; and

"Whereas public transit riders and workers have the right to ride and work on public transit free of violence, intimidation and harm;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to put an end to violence on public transit and protect our workers and support private member's Bill 151 to crack down on violence and abuse on public transit."

I support Bob Kinnear and the men and women of the Amalgamated Transit Union of Toronto and I affix my name to it.

PROTECTION OF MINORS

Mr. Martiniuk: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is no law in Ontario prohibiting pornography or sexually explicit material from being viewed on computers in public schools and libraries; and

"Whereas there are public schools and public libraries that do not use Internet filtering software on computers that blocks such inappropriate material; and

"Whereas parents in the province of Ontario have the right to ensure their children are protected from pornography and other inappropriate material available on the Internet in their public schools and libraries;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: That all public schools and libraries in Ontario be required to install Internet filtering software on computers to avoid viewing of sites with inappropriate, explicit sexual content."

As I support this petition I affix my name thereto.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

POVERTY REDUCTION ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA RÉDUCTION DE LA PAUVRETÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 24, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario / Projet de loi 152, Loi concernant une stratégie à long terme de réduction de la pauvreté en Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? The member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I frankly didn't expect to be called upon this quickly for this debate, but as is the case in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, the motto of the Boy Scouts is, "Be prepared." Regardless of when that call may come, you have to be prepared to rise and engage as is necessary. So I am doing that as is necessary.

So thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this bill, and I appreciate the legislative staff for getting me a copy of this on short notice. It's much appreciated to have this in hand as we debate this legislation. But I must say, I'm not sure what we are really debating. I don't say that to try to minimize my knowledge of the bill, though it is not as broad and in-depth as that of my colleague Ms. Munro from York Simcoe. I say that because there is not much in this bill. It's a vacuous bill, an empty bill. To use the term of my colleague with which she so aptly describes it, this bill as being a perfect example of what has become the Liberal way in this government, a perfect example of what she terms as "gesture politics," which can be described as "the substitution of symbols and empty promises for policy." That is what we're getting from this government over and over again.

When you look at the bill, in the very first part, the preamble, this is what it says—and I'll just slip on my glasses, because the printing is a little small.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Just lengthen your arms.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Some people say they're long enough.

"The government of Ontario is committed,

"(a) to regular consultations with respect to the strategy;

"(b) to measuring the success of the strategy by setting a target at least every five years and assessing indicators of poverty reduction; and

"(c) to reporting annually on the success of the strategy."

Well, if that doesn't speak to the principle of gesture politics, I'm not sure what does. I appreciate my colleague's acknowledgment on that part.

What are they actually doing about poverty by bringing in this bill? The short answer would be: writing a report. They're writing a report. Now, people who have been living in poverty are going to find a report—and no pun intended, Mr. Speaker—a little hard to digest. What they're really looking for is some kind of answer from the government with respect to the situation that they find themselves in. They're not looking for another report. I'm not suggesting that you can solve problems without dialogue and without consultations, but we've been over that ad nauseam for years.

One of the things I'd like to talk about as well, and it's very unfortunate that this government likes to paint themselves as the friend of the underprivileged—

Mr. John O'Toole: Of everybody.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, yes, that's true. They would like to paint themselves as the friend of everybody. I thank the member from Durham for pointing out

that very important fact. They want to be everybody's friend, because if you're out there, they'll find a way to buy your silence or your support.

They often go on about what they see as the poor record of the previous government. A couple of things I'd like to point out, and I think this is important: The former government, between 1995 and 2000, took a quarter of a million people out of poverty. Between 1995 and 2000, in the province of Ontario, a quarter of a million people were lifted out of poverty because the government gave them what they needed: hope and opportunity.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Hope and opportunity. They established a Learning, Earning and Parenting program, otherwise known as LEAP. They established breakfast programs, Healthy Babies and early years centres.

We have a record. They have an empty, meaningless, report-writing bill. I think that is an important distinction.

This government talks about helping those people who are the most vulnerable, but what in fact they're doing with the management of the economy that they've embarked on—they've done everything they can do to stifle growth and stifle opportunity because they want you to see them as your guardian and your nursemaid, when in fact what people really want is an opportunity. This government has done everything they can to stifle growth and opportunity in this province by huge tax increases; since they've come into office, we're talking \$2,000 to \$2,500 per family in additional taxes and fees brought in by this government. That's absolutely unacceptable if you are talking about giving people opportunity.

The bill says nothing about what they're going to do to lift people out of poverty, although the previous government had a record of lifting a quarter of a million people out of poverty in a five-year period. This bill is going to do nothing, other than ensure that there'll be more reports written and more discussions. The bill doesn't even direct us as to what will be done with the reports once they're written. Will they simply be collecting dust somewhere or shuffled from one bureaucrat to another, or is there actually a requirement that action be taken as a result of reports that are written? Nothing in this bill would dictate that or would require that at all.

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When we're talking about the poorest people in the province, and even people who slip up, who are a little higher up the ladder, they are the ones who are affected most when the government increases fees and costs of essential services. They are the ones who have been hit the hardest, for example, by the health care tax. They are the ones who have been hit hardest by rising energy costs in this province. They are the ones who have been hit the hardest by the delisting of services through our medical insurance program. They're the ones who get hit the hardest, and these people on the other side always want to talk to you about how they're trying to help those people who are lower than the high-income earners.

Let's talk about a hydro bill. If you look at a hydro bill and you're making \$250,000, you know what? It's not

really relevant to you. But if you are making \$30,000 and you've got four kids at home, that hydro bill is really important. And this government, because they want to paint themselves as the green government, is going to ensure that those hydro bills are going to go up exponentially over the next 10 years. Who is going to get hit the most? It's going to be those people who have the least discretionary income, because electricity is not a luxury. I like the way my friend Mr. O'Toole from Durham puts it. He says, "You know what? You can call up the cable company and say, 'Shut 'er down. We're not taking the cable anymore,' but you can't shut down the electricity in your home." It's essential. It's absolutely essential to be able to provide light and security to your family. So this government wants to embark upon a program that will ensure that that essential service gets much more expensive for people here in the province of Ontario, and particularly those who can least afford it.

You have to ask yourself why we're even debating this bill. We're basically debating about setting up the rules for the discussions. Would I be correct in putting it that way, I say to my friend, our critic from York-Simcoe? Basically, we're setting up the ground rules for a discussion.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Without any accountability.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No accountability and no action.

I would like to think that this Legislature has more important things to do than talk about the rules surrounding a discussion. I think we need to do some things that actually impact those people who are suffering in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, some of those 300,000 people who have lost their jobs and are joining the rolls of poverty in the province of Ontario. Contrasting our record of taking people and lifting people off poverty because we gave them opportunity and hope, this government is pushing them into poverty because they have no hope and certainly no opportunities under this government, only a Premier who wrings his hands and says, "This is a blip," or "This is a minor contraction," and "This too shall pass." Well, it's not going to pass unless the government acts to make it pass, and not with bills that speak to talking; we need bills that speak to doing.

I want to talk about the government's proposal or plan, the semi-leaked plan, among other leaks in this budget—

Mrs. Julia Munro: It's a sieve.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a sieve; of course it's a sieve. We know these leaks are by design. We certainly understand that. It's all part of this strategy, this gesture politics. They are trying to ensure that people in their stable remain in their stable, and those who are not in their stable enter and stay in the stable. You know, "Come into my parlour," said the spider to the fly. That's what they do to every special-interest group in this province; they're finding a way to try to attract them to the Liberal fold by having some kind of piece of legislation that they can sell to that particular group. It really is politics at its most cynical.

Anyway, on the plan or the suggestion—excuse me; I swallowed a piece of ice there. Almost choked. Don't

everybody clap, because I just said “almost.” The plan to possibly harmonize the sales tax at a time when Ontario’s unemployment rate is leading the country and economists expect that it could go over 10% in the next year: That’s scary. So at a time that these are the prospects for Ontario, this government wants to make sure that if you’re selling your home, you’re going to have to have an energy audit on it. Even if you’re changing tenancies in an apartment building they’re going to have to have energy audits on them. It’s absolutely crazy.

Here’s the list of things that low-income people have to buy. Some of these may seem unimportant, but if you are in a low-income situation, most of your food is prepared at home. Some of these things that are going to be taxed under this plan—and if you do your own baking and make your own bread, baking powder and baking soda are going to be taxed. Diapers: going to be taxed. All kinds of uniforms: going to be taxed. So if you are raising a family—personal care items, hygiene products. If you are raising a family of young children, and some of us in this Legislature are—and some of us are grandparents and some of us are past both points of having infants or children in diapers, whether they’re children or grandchildren. But if you’re in that category, you know how expensive it is to have to pay for those kinds of things. In Dalton McGuinty’s Ontario, in what they purport to be a real commitment to reduce poverty, they’re going to ensure that more of that limited money is going to be spent on essentials such as those kinds of items.

When I go through this list—and my colleague from Nepean—Carleton, Ms. Macleod, had a question on that today in the Legislature. I could go through this whole list, but the reality is, if I go through the list, there’s not enough time on the clock for me to do it, even if I just did them one at a time, but eggs; fish, fresh, frozen, canned, dried, etc.; flour; fruit, fresh, frozen, dried, etc.; fruit juice and fruit drinks; honey; jams and jellies. Those are just the food products. Clothing: coats, jackets, ski jackets, gloves, jeans, slacks, sneakers and sports shoes. If you’ve got kids, you’ve got to put something on their feet. Sweaters, uniforms: Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, hockey, lacrosse.

You really have to ask yourself, and the Premier said in the fall, among some of his other statements—first he was trying to deny that Ontario was in an economic mess, and then he said, “No one would raise taxes during difficult times.” If you’re a consumer, a low-income person, and the Premier does what he’s intimating he may do and the cost of all these goods that were previously not taxed at the provincial level is now taxed, I don’t know how you could view that as anything but raising taxes. That would certainly classify as a broken promise.

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I’m not suggesting that the Premier is going to get too worked up about my suggesting he’s breaking a promise, because the fact is, the Premier has never gotten too worked up about breaking a promise. He does that quite

easily. You know, the first time you break a promise, it’s tough. The second time you break a promise, it’s a little easier. It’s just like every other indiscretion.

Hon. James J. Bradley: What should I do with the letter that says you support it?

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Transportation says he wants to read a letter. I can certainly say he has never seen a letter with my name on it.

Hon. James J. Bradley: But Conservatives—

Mr. John Yakabuski: I’m speaking today, and our party has made it clear that this is not something we support. But I just want to make it very clear to the minister that he is making that up, as so many times he does.

Like any other indiscretion, the more often you do it, the easier it gets. It doesn’t make it right; it doesn’t make it justifiable. It’s just that in your own mind it can become a bit of a habit. So when it comes to breaking promises, unfortunately, the Premier has gotten so good at it that I’m not sure he even recognizes anymore when he breaks a promise. That is regrettable, because the longer he’s in office, it’s just going to get easier. So we’re certainly hopeful that, at the very next opportunity the people of Ontario have, they do not give Dalton McGuinty too much more opportunity to continue to break promises.

I do hope we get some more substantive action, and not more paperwork, on the subject of poverty. It is cynical at best to be putting forward something like this, suggesting that it is going to improve the lot of underprivileged people in this province. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The member for York—Simcoe.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I just want to add a few comments to those of my colleague. Certainly, I think one of the disappointments in this piece of legislation is the fact that all it requires of the government of the day is to produce an annual report and have a strategy session once every five years. When you know that what people need is the security of a job and the supports in place to provide hope and opportunity, this obviously is something that does nothing like that. Even in terms of the report writing, there is no indication in the bill about with whom the minister must consult, by what time and to what extent. Then, the report required by this bill to come out of this process doesn’t have to be public. There is no indication or responsibility about to whom it might be addressed. It doesn’t mean that a committee of the Legislature could actually review the report; it just says that it must write a report. It’s very hard not to become cynical about the fact that there’s no obligation beyond writing a report after you’ve consulted with an unnamed group of people.

Even the question of the strategy session is interesting. It’s required every five years. Well, as we know, the Legislature is now guided by pre-set election dates, which are, of course, four years apart, so immediately it raises the suspicion of cynicism when you’re looking at the fact that another government comes in and looks at developing a strategy, but it has no specific responsibilities—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I thank the member for York–Simcoe for her response or comments on my speech. Clearly she agrees with what we have said, and the absence of any comments from members of the government would imply that they must agree with everything I said as well, so I appreciate that and I appreciate the support on this bill. They all recognize, because they're not rising, that just as I said, this bill is just about printing reports. First of all, the bill itself is just a bit of a report. So it is interesting that members of the government are not standing up to defend this bill, because there's nothing there to defend.

What our critic, the member for York–Simcoe, has said in her address and what we're speaking to today, as well as other things, is that this bill really does nothing. It only requires the government to sit down on a regular basis and chat. Well, we can do that in committee. We can have stakeholder groups come in to address us. We can do that by having special events throughout the province, but this only requires—we're having a piece of legislation that just says, "You must sit down and talk."

Now we're requiring the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario to pass a bill, which I know will be passed because the government has a vast majority; it will be passed. We're passing a piece of legislation that just requires of us to sit down on a regular basis and talk about poverty. That's not something that needs to be done by law. That's something we should be doing because we're committed to doing something about it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to thank my good friend from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for sort of setting the stage here for what I consider to be some content part of the debate. Anyway, he's always very good at that.

I would say that the important way to start at this bill—it's a very small, innocuous bill and this bill really, I think, is tragic. It's one page because it's done in two official languages. For the viewer today and to put on the record, on my own behalf as well as our party's, in the explanatory notes it tells us basically what it's required to do: to maintain a long-term poverty reduction strategy set out in a report that they issued in December 2008 called *Breaking the Cycle*. Every new or modified long-term poverty reduction strategy is to be based on the principles set out in the bill, and they include the following.

It's really setting up a framework. It's like an empty house; there's nothing in it. It says, "(a) a specific poverty reduction target"; that should be zero. I'm going to give you that right now: It should be zero. So once they're going to extend a consultation, they'll spend more money on coffee and doughnuts in the meetings setting these targets while the people who are starving get nothing.

It says: "(b) initiatives designed to improve the economic and social conditions of persons and families

living in poverty." Tomorrow's the budget. They're going to set out their targets and conditions. What are they going to do? They're going to raise taxes and cut services, period. I don't know. It's hard to believe anything they say.

And "(c) indicators that are linked to the determinants of poverty to measure the success of the strategy": They're going to have some accountability framework. Well, the accountability is, look at the unemployment numbers. Look at the growth in welfare and Ontario Works. The evidence is already there. So I think this is nothing but a sham, really, in terms of the poverty that's in front of us every single day. Each of us in our constituency, we know that this is a real problem.

Finally it says, "The government of Ontario is required to establish a specific poverty reduction target at least every five years."

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In all honesty, this bill does very, very little. The evidence will be tomorrow, when you see to what they attribute the loss of over 300,000 manufacturing jobs, and how those families are going to cope. On top of that, the Second Career money—they've announced millions of dollars, and what we heard in one of the questions this morning is that you can't get into the program. It's just not working.

But in my riding of Durham—I want to be clear here. These are real people; I want their names on the record, and I commend them publicly for the work they do. It's my job to listen to and work with them.

These are people who may not actually cast a ballot for me. I'm in hopes that they do, but that's another question. One of them is Peter Utnans, who has worked and called and told me and e-mailed me and talked to me relentlessly on this topic. In fact, I believe he tried in get in on the closed-door debates they had on the poverty reduction task force. You couldn't get into them, and if you did, they muscled a few people out of the meetings, because there were NDP members who had an agenda of their own and they kind of walked them out.

Another one is Joan Randall. Ms. Joan Randall is a volunteer who works in the St. Vincent de Paul reuse store, next door to my constituency office—all volunteers, working tirelessly. What do they do there? I've written to the Minister of Finance 15 times—I may be exaggerating; maybe five times. Do you know something? On used clothes and shoes for children, and winter boots, they charge provincial sales tax. Did you know that? In the used stores—members should pay attention to this—Salvation Army, St. Vincent de Paul and others—all volunteers—they pay provincial sales tax. These people who are homeless pay sales tax on used shoes, used snowsuits. I'm not making this up. It's shameful. I've written to the minister, and I could show you five letters where he's refused to review it. That doesn't make any sense.

Here's another one. These are real people I'm bringing to you. Don't get mad at me; I'm just the messenger.

The other one is Heather Beveridge, a wonderful person and, I would say, a person with a huge social

conscience; a social justice person. I think she brings it from a religious persuasion. She's a very kind-hearted person. I've met with her several times. She had the courage to write—a very intelligent woman as well, Heather. She is the chair of North House, which is a group in Uxbridge that looks out for people who are in need—social, economic, emotional; you name it. A wonderful person. They feel like they're being ignored in this, that they're being—I'll get to the bill in a second. I'm giving credit to people who make me do my job more effectively.

Another person—this one is really good—is Mr. Ron Dancey. Some of you may have heard from him. Mr. Dancey is the chair of the Durham committee called Make Poverty History. When I was on the Durham region health and social services committee as a regional councillor some years ago—it seems like yesterday; I've had so much fun here—the fact is, he was the director of social services. He was probably making \$100,000 a year. Now he's the chair of the poverty thing, Make Poverty History. His pension is probably more than I make, but that's a separate debate. I'm not criticizing him. At least he's out there working for people who he knows first-hand are in poverty. These are the people—

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'll be sending them to Hansard too. When I use their names, I do send them to Hansard. I do—on the record.

My good friend from the other side—he should be on this side; he is a nice fellow—Wayne Arthurs, from Pickering-Scarborough East: a good gentleman. He's here. It's good to see him here, listening. I think he had the same briefing. This briefing—I give the people credit. They were leaders in the community, and I'm going to talk about it for a moment, because it is so important that we give credit to the people who help us do our jobs effectively.

I did make a suggestion to the two organizers: Wanda Secord, who is the executive director of Durham Children's Aid Society—she is a constituent of mine. I'm not sure if she's a supporter of mine, but, hey, it's not that important. She is a supporter in this respect: She's telling me what's going on. She, along with Dr. Hugh Drouin, who is the current commissioner of social services for the region of Durham, organized a group, and the report that they have put together is entitled *The Unraveling of Ontario's Social Safety Net*. I know the member from Pickering-Scarborough East, Mr. Arthurs, as well as Joe Dickson, the member from Ajax-Pickering, I would expect, briefed them separately from us. I questioned them when they briefed us. Why did they treat us differently? We're here for all the people of Ontario. We may have differences, but I firmly believe that the members in this Legislature are all here for the right reasons.

So I think the stakeholder groups that I just referred to—the meeting we had was on February 27, 2009, and I'm going to give you a bit of background on it, but these groups collectively represent, I think, very important

stakeholders who have a very strong commitment to the objective of eliminating poverty, or to at least dealing with it.

The Canadian Mental Health Association—we know that many street people may have mental health issues; it's been reported by the academics and the specialists in that area. Another one of the groups represented that day was Catholic Family Services of Durham. Mary Wells actually was the person, and she was a very committed person in a general sense for the welfare of mankind, regardless of religion and things like that. The Community Development Council, Durham children's aid, Durham College—in fact, Judy Robinson was there from the college, and she's certainly in the administrative group. Then we had the Durham Regional Police Service. In fact, that day at the meeting we had Police Chief Mike Ewles, a terrific guy dealing with domestic violence and all those things. He gave us some of the context of what people living in stress deal with. We had the Kinark Child and Family Services of Durham, the Oshawa Community Health Centre, which is a new health centre, and I think that's a good thing—the health centres provide a range of collaborative health care, a very important group—and the social service department of the region of Durham, which is headed up by Dr. Hugh Drouin.

These experts in the area talked about this unravelling of Ontario's social safety net—this is their report, and I could supply it to members at their request—the unravelling, the undoing, the vulnerability of the social safety net. Now, who's the government? They like to blame Mike Harris for everything. They've been in power for over five years and they have increased spending by about 30%, maybe 40%, and revenue has been up, and they may even take credit for that. Now they're blaming everybody else, but when it goes up, they take credit; when it goes down, they don't. That doesn't make any sense.

Here's the deal: They've increased spending—one person should start at the beginning here. Are we any better off? Did they save up for a rainy day? No, they didn't. They have spent 'er all and now they have nothing to fix the problem.

Here's what the bill—it's a disguise, and this is the kind of language that I may upset people with because it's the truth. I'm going to list the things that the bill does not do, because it eliminates things they do more than it commits them to doing things.

The bill does not itself reduce poverty in Ontario. Clearly, in our analysis, it creates a bureaucracy for the purpose of establishing strategies. “Coffee and doughnuts, anyone?” at the meetings, and we're talking about poverty. Poverty, homelessness and starvation won't occur at the meetings.

The bill does not penalize the government that fails to meet their targets. There are no penalties here for failing to disclose or failing to meet.

The bill does not provide for external oversight. Why not have some of these groups like the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Community Development Coun-

cil, Durham College; why not have independent stakeholders, some of the constituents like Heather Beveridge or Ron Dancey, who are eminently qualified to monitor and report? Why not? We should all agree with that. I'm in agreement. Let's give the people some hope, especially in these times of economic turmoil. I don't blame all this on Premier McGuinty. What I blame him for is that he has no plan to get out of it. I think they're just sort of standing around waiting to blame Stephen Harper or somebody.

Mr. Mike Colle: It's Mike Harris's fault.

Mr. John O'Toole: Blame Mike Harris or John A. Macdonald. Blame somebody—"It's not me." The buck stops at the top, really. Remember? He may not know what's going on, but he should.

Here's the deal: The bill does not require new targets every five years, despite requiring new strategies. Here's the conundrum: It says in the bill that it requires new strategies every five years as we adjust the economy—it becomes a knowledge-based economy, manufacturing into a transformative economy, financial services etc.—but it doesn't set new targets. Some people are getting left behind. Let's track that.

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The bill does not do anything new. The minister already has a mandate to undertake initiatives to support the well-being of Ontarians. All governments, quite frankly, have that. In fact, our major commitment should be looking after those who don't have hope and opportunity.

I think that if you look at the preamble of the bill, it's always a good place to start. Quite frankly, it outlines very, very little. As I said at the beginning of my remarks, it does set three specifics: "(a) a specific poverty reduction target; (b) initiatives designed to improve the economic and social conditions"—we'll see about that tomorrow—and "(c) indicators that are linked to the determinants of poverty...." The determinant of poverty is that you're homeless, you actually have mental health—there are other social connections here that determine it. Often these conditions are a feeling of hopelessness.

In my view—it's not necessarily a religious comment; it's a comment in general—if you lose hope in life, you're morally dead. That's a cruel statement, but if you lose hope, if there's no hope, violence precipitates from this particular angle. When you have no hope, who cares? I cannot help but believe that the most important things in life are hope and dignity.

If you have a sense of being valued in life as an individual, as a human being, regardless of age or gender or cultural background, if you feel valued in society and that there's really no barrier to your entry, whether it's to schools or training or jobs—those are important roles of government, to eliminate those barriers. Creating more bureaucracy and structures may sound good, but you pretty well had to have a graduate degree to complete the first iteration of the application to get into Second Career. It was very comprehensive. I was told by the new

president of Durham College, Don Lovisa, that that was one of the problems with the slow uptake on the first introduction of Second Career.

We could talk longer on this bill, and with your indulgence, I will, but if I get the sign I could leave. I think we're all in agreement about the goal of the bill, the theme of the bill, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario. They had the report that I said was issued in December 2008. I had a look at that; I sent it out to stakeholders in my community. I wanted to hear. I sent it to the ministerial association. I sent it out to all the ministerial groups, including some of the service providers I have mentioned, asking for their comments. Now, if they gave me an e-mail or a letter, I can tell you that I would never interfere with or interpret it. I would send it to the minister and let him see what my constituents think, unfiltered and unedited: "Minister, see attached from the north Durham group" or "from Ron Dancey's Make Poverty History campaign."

I still think the minister has talked a lot about it and tries to sound as if they're really the only ones who care. I like to see action. Actions speak louder than words. But in our experience on this side, these strategies often have to come with difficult decisions and responsibility for decisions that may go wrong. It's clear that some of the campaigns they've had out there have worked, some better than others. But some of them have not, and I think they should admit those things and not try to sort of sweep them under the cupboard or under the closet or somewhere out of sight and out of mind.

When I met with these groups, they were talking about what they see right down at the front line of poverty. The number of domestic assaults per day in Durham, according to police Chief Mike Ewles, is 12. They called on the important role of leadership municipally and provincially, and indeed federally, to see that the leadership is aware of this.

The campaign at the United Nations to eliminate child poverty some years ago is at the overarching roof of all of these laudable goals. How have we done as a society? Not very good. In fact, more and more people are being left behind, I believe, and that's a function of government not paying attention to the vulnerable in society.

The importance of having safety in a community when there is a bit of social unrest, as you can go through with an economic downturn: People can become a little desperate in those times, services can be tapped and people can become frustrated, and there can be other manifestations in society.

I'm the municipal affairs critic, and even to the extent that they promised to look at the municipal re-servicing or restructured plan—in that municipal infrastructure review and the financing of it, they tabled a report here, and in it they promise to upload Ontario Works to the provincial level. But the only problem is, it's going to take them about 10 years to do it.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Who downloaded it?

Mr. Mike Colle: Mike Harris.

Mr. John O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transportation, Mr. Bradley, has directed a question—

Interjection: He does a lot of heckling, doesn't he?

Mr. John O'Toole: He has directed a question, and I think it's important. I put to him that he is asking the wrong question, and I'll tell you why. Social assistance, welfare, now called Ontario Works: If they're so against it, why didn't they cancel it? They talk a great line. The real issue here is this—I wouldn't question; he's a profound member, and I respect the member. I want that to be clear. But quite honestly, social assistance, welfare, Ontario Works was never, ever a provincial program—ever. It started with the churches. If you know history, then you know the future. But it was never, ever a provincial program. It became more and more, up to 50% a provincial program. At one time, it was the churches, then it was the municipalities, and then the provinces were lobbied into taking some responsibility. In fact, I believe firmly that if they'd have done something of any consequence, they would have uploaded Ontario Works. Now, what's the history of that? We can be assured that Ontario Works will be on the agenda every year, including this year, because the numbers are going up in welfare. Now, I don't attribute all the blame to Mr. McGuinty—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

Mr. John O'Toole: Unanimous consent, Mr. Speaker, to speak for another 15 minutes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member has asked for unanimous consent to speak for another 15 minutes. I believe I heard a no.

Questions and comments?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I just want to comment briefly on the speech given to us by the member from Durham. I think that being able to look at all of the groups within his own community is a demonstration of his commitment to his community but also an understanding of the fact that these are real people we're talking about and their concerns. It behooves us as a Legislature to be doing something more concrete than this bill allows. This bill allows us to have an annual report, and it doesn't give any indication of support—real support—for people.

The minister has laid out for herself an ambitious target of 91,000 children out of poverty in five years, but I think the member has indicated through his remarks the kinds of challenges that people face and the fact that report writing isn't one of those challenges. It's not one of the answers. So while we have no quarrel with report writing, it does fall short of giving people any kind of concrete idea of the kinds of initiatives that should be undertaken by the government. By the explanations of the problems within the community that my colleague has spoken of, it's clear that we need more than gesture politics.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

The member for Durham, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to thank the member from York-Simcoe and all of the members who were so supportive of my attempt to fill the time here.

I first want to conclude by saying thanks to the people I mentioned by name and by title in the report, especially the groups that I met with—Wanda Secord from children's aid and the authors of The Unraveling of Ontario's Social Safety Net.

I think all of us have those stakeholders in our community, not always from churches but often from the social fabric of our communities, who we should listen to, and I hope that they will be listened to when this bill, I hope, goes to committee to be fleshed out in terms of some of the content, or lack of content, in the bill.

I would say that our critic, the member for York-Simcoe, who has just spoken in response, has provided us with a very comprehensive review of the bill, more to the point of what it does not do. What it should do is mandate certain deliverables. These are deliverables so that the people of Ontario who are frustrated by the economy, generally, and their circumstances, specifically, have hope. A leadership would give them hope by setting real, achievable targets and reporting on them on a regular basis—say, during this economic time, every few months. I think that's what's required here.

Specific actions tomorrow might be shown in the budget. I'll give that much leeway to the Premier, that he could, tomorrow, lay all of what I've said aside by showing a genuine commitment in real terms to deliverables in the budget dealing with poverty and housing and other shortfalls in our society. I look for more comments on this bill in the next few minutes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? Does any other member wish to speak?

Ms. Matthews has moved second reading of Bill 152.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Mr. Mike Colle: No.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Where would you like it to go? To which committee would you like it referred?

Hon. Brad Duguid: We'd like it referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): So ordered.

TOBACCO DAMAGES AND HEALTH CARE COSTS RECOVERY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE RECOUVREMENT DU MONTANT DES DOMMAGES ET DU COÛT DES SOINS DE SANTÉ IMPUTABLES AU TABAC

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 11, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 155, An Act to

permit the Province to recover damages and health care costs incurred because of tobacco related diseases and to make a complementary amendment to the Limitations Act, 2002 / *Projet de loi 155, Loi autorisant la province à recouvrer le montant des dommages et du coût des soins de santé engagés en raison des maladies liées au tabac et à apporter une modification complémentaire à la Loi de 2002 sur la prescription des actions.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? The member for—it used to be Welland.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Welland.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Welland, yes; it still is.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Wasn't Ellis Morningstar the member for Welland?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Ellis Morningstar was the member for Welland many, many years ago. He sat in this chamber for decades. I remember him well. He was always very generous to me and to my family.

Mr. John Yakabuski: A fairly ample man.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Look, Ellis Morningstar was a large man, and I have great affection for him. He, of course, was succeeded by Mel Swart, who was my mentor and who preceded me here.

New Democrats support this legislation. We expect that it'll pass reasonably promptly. We will let the government decide whether or not it goes to committee, and the government will have to indicate whether or not there are flaws in this bill that have to be addressed by way of amendments at committee. We look forward, if need be, to working with other members of the committee at that stage.

I remember the advocacy of my colleague Shelley Martel from Nickel Belt, who was our long-time health critic, now retired from this assembly, her fight for a tobacco-free Ontario and her work with the government around government legislation that has made some changes around the regulation and control of tobacco. But I tell you, I'm going to operate with this premise right from the get-go: that all of the stuff that's been done so far, all of the money that's been spent and all of the pain that's been suffered by corner stores—because they of course are under strict rules about not being able to market tobacco products, and nobody quarrels with that—have not had a significant impact on tobacco use in this province.

Look, we support this legislation. We supported other anti-tobacco initiatives. Of course we did. I don't say with any joy—I say it with great disappointment—that tobacco use seems to be at a somewhat consistent level.

Let me tell you how I reached that conclusion. I took a look at the government's finance papers, and I saw that in 2004-05, tobacco tax revenue for the province was \$1.453 billion. Since then, of course, we've had strict legislation around marketing tobacco. We've had those power walls taken down in corner stores. We've had huge amounts of education. We've also had a flourishing and growing illegal tobacco trade, and I've read estimates

that up to 46% of tobacco being consumed in Ontario today is illegal tobacco, so that's tobacco upon which no provincial or federal taxes are being paid. Look what we've got for 2008-09: \$1.092 billion in revenue. Almost half of the tobacco, 46%, we're told, is being purchased as illegal tobacco upon which no taxes are being paid. If that were the case, we may even have an increase in tobacco consumption, because at almost 50%, you would expect that if it were stable, you'd have half of \$1.453 billion, right? You'd be down to \$700 million.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Seven or seven and a half or whatever.

Mr. Peter Kormos: So \$700 million or \$750 million. So this news isn't very promising. It's frightening. It's downright scary.

I had occasion to listen to a whole lot of debate over the course of a whole lot of years around the tobacco issue. I'm a recovered smoker, and I was bad. I was as bad and as addicted a smoker as ever could be.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Do you still sneak one here and there?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I have no use for tobacco whatsoever, Mr. Bradley.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I sneak one here and there, but I'm not a smoker.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. Yakabuski comments, and of course the minister responds to him. That'll make a nice Hansard for your children to read.

Look, I understand the addiction. I understand it real good. It took me years and try after try after try to quit smoking, and 30 pounds later, I say with some confidence that I'm less likely than I ever have been before in my life to smoke a cigarette again. I feel good about that.

I'm not even of a generation that can claim to have started smoking before people knew about the dangers. It was in 1964—I was 12 years old—when the Surgeon General of the United States, Dr. Luther L. Terry, released his commission's report dramatically educating North Americans and the whole world about the dangers of tobacco. I was only 12 years old, but there was still a persistent enough presence of tobacco in the pop and commercial world.

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I grew up with two smoking parents. As a matter of fact, my maternal grandparents were tobacco farmers. I was as much a tobacco baby as anybody could be. When I was a very young preschooler, my mother would go back from Welland out to Delhi, Tillsonburg, where her family lived, to the tobacco farm, and I'd be the tobacco baby brought along into the tobacco fields. She did things like suckering. She did things like tying the leaves once they were picked. I remember horse-drawn boats that carried the tobacco to the, usually, women who tied them onto the sticks where the men put them up into the kilns. I was an old man before I learned that they weren't called "kills," because that's what they were called down in the Haldimand-Norfolk area.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Put them in the kills.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Put them in the kills. But really they're kilns.

You drive along Highway 3, there; you drive down into Toby Barrett's part of the country. There's some very beautiful country past Highway 6. If you take it south on Highway 6, you're going down to Port Dover and the Erie Beach restaurant, with the finest perch short of that, I suppose—paralleled by that—up in Garfield Dunlop's riding. That Erie Beach Hotel perch is the best you can get. You order platters of it till you simply can't eat anymore. But if you go back north—of course by now, when you're down on Highway 6, you're driving past the Nanticoke steel factory as well, the one that's—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Shut down.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Shut down—not employing any more workers.

You keep driving west and you still see some of the kilns, usually with green asphalt paper on the exterior, and you see the remnants of the tobacco farm. Yet, notwithstanding that the tobacco farmer has virtually no market for his product and is being forced to find alternative product to grow and market with very little aid from the federal government and no aid from the provincial government—and the tobacco farmer understands full well that the leaf he was growing, she was growing, wasn't good for the people consuming it—there is just a remarkable market for illegal tobacco.

I had a chance to read a paper called *Contraband Cigarettes in Ontario*, published by the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit in November 2007. So it's a couple of years dated by now. It made reference to the numerous tobacco products that are being sold on First Nation reserves. They're designed to be purchased by members of those reserves and consumed by members of those reserves. We find out that only 2% of the Ontario population, according to this paper, is First Nations, yet almost 50% of tobacco product is coming from the reserves. That means there's a whole lot of non-reserve people smoking that stuff.

A troubling thing about it, from a consumer perspective, is that it's not just tobacco being made by Imperial Tobacco Canada Ltd., Rothmans, Benson and Hedges and so on, to the extent that any of those are still operating. It's numerous brands produced on the reserve with tobacco grown in any number of places—untraceable—including, I suspect, China, with all of the additional toxins that one is likely to find in a Chinese-grown product, and brands, I'm told, like DK and Sago and Putter's and Golden Leaf. I'm told you don't buy these in a carton of cigarettes; you buy them in a big plastic bag, half the size of a garbage bag, 250 or 300 cigarettes at a time. But they're dirt cheap. And who ends up smoking them more often than not?

Look, we know that when you raise the price of cigarettes, it has a direct impact on the amount of cigarettes people smoke. I was hardcore and affluent enough that it didn't stop me, but most smokers, far more rational than I was around the issue, respond to price increases, usually tax increases, by making commitments to quit smoking.

So we know that the more expensive the tobacco product is, the fewer people are going to consume it. The cheaper it is, the more are going to consume it.

For whom is that most important? It's for kids who don't have weekly incomes of any substantial amount. We've seen the data coming from research that's the result of literally doing forays onto school grounds, checking where high school students smoke, picking up the butts, analyzing them and finding out that the vast majority of them are these illegal brands that are dirt, dirt cheap.

Look, down where I live, on Bald Street in Welland, I've got a little corner store. I suppose I'm lucky because I live just one block in from West Main. The corner store we have is Denistoun Variety, logically, because it's on Denistoun Street. The folks who bought that, oh, 30 years ago now, Monica and Tsang Ahn, I've come to know very, very well: Korean folks, hard-working people. I watched them as they came to Welland from another part of Ontario after they had come here from South Korea, and their boy Jay was just a little kid. I watched them work in that corner store 18 and 20 hours a day, as you well know, because they were there first thing in the morning. I went there—it was before computers, so I didn't have a computer in my den for reading the Internet papers—in the morning to get the *Globe* and so on at 6 in the morning, and they'd be there at 11 at night, as hard-working people as you're going to find, and honest—honest as the day is long. You know it. You know exactly the kind of folks I'm talking about.

As a matter of fact, their boy is grown up now. He's studying for a master's degree in film down at the University of Miami. So you know how hard Monica and Tsang Ahn have had to work to send their son Jay down to the University of Miami as a foreign student paying US tuition fees. You know how hard they had to work.

They comply with the law. They've been rigorous about not selling cigarettes to underage kids—really rigorous. They took down their power wall and spent a small fortune on the vault-type wall that we see all over the place now in the back of their store because that's the kind of compliance they have to have. But these people are hurting bad. The corner store, with the advent of Sunday shopping, has been seriously undermined. They have two products that draw people into the store. You know what they are. It's lottery tickets and it's cigarettes.

They, along with the Korean Businessmen's Association, have been pleading with this government and with the federal government to get with it when it comes to enforcing legislation around the illegal cigarettes coming off of reserves. Two reasons: one, it gives the corner store a little bit of breathing room; two, it appears that there's a danger that the vast majority of people smoking those cheap cigarettes off the reserve are youngsters, children.

Just anecdotally, I'm convinced that my generation—which is most of the middle-aged people here—who did smoke have quit smoking. It's not our kids, it's our grandkids now, who are doing the smoking. I say that

just anecdotally. Drive past a high school. Drive past a hangout, a lunch joint where high school kids hang out. It's frightening to still see. It's a rare thing now to see people our age smoking. We look at it as an oddity. We don't even think—in days gone by, somebody would say, "Would you mind if I smoked?" They don't even think of saying that now. We don't have ashtrays in our houses anymore. Yet teenagers are smoking, and I can't come to you with hard data other than the data that's flowed from the people who have done the on-the-ground research picking up cigarette butts around school grounds, and the anecdotal evidence that all of us have endured driving past a high school.

Of course, you can't smoke on high school property; they're across the road. You want to shake these kids. I suppose the most dramatic thing is that it's made me feel like my father. Of course, we all used to assure ourselves that we'd never become like our fathers, right? You want to grab these kids and just shake the daylight out of them, and that's what causes me concern.

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This legislation is very symbolic. The lawyers are going to make a fortune. The class action guys, my friend from down Windsor way, the Bay Street fellows and gals, they're going to be wallowing in taxpayers' money that's going to be financing this lawsuit. Heck, little B series Mercedes-Benzes bought by the OLG—they're not even real Mercedes. Well, they're not. They're pathetic little things. They've got a Mercedes sticker on them. I'd rather drive a Daewoo or a Hyundai, for Pete's sake, before I would ever drive one of those B series Mercedes. They're little junkers.

But this lawsuit will buy more S series—now, that's a Mercedes-Benz. We're talking about the \$160,000 job. This lawsuit will buy more S series Mercedes-Benzes for Bay Street lawyers than you can shake a stick at because, you see, it'll be an endless pit. The funding of it will be an endless pit, and whether or not you ever get judgment remains questionable.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's optics. They want everybody to think they're suing tobacco.

Mr. Peter Kormos: The purpose of this is to try to emulate the dramatic John Grisham-like lawsuits against American tobacco companies, which were based on class actions by the victims themselves. The government has run out of steam when it comes to its anti-tobacco agenda. It refuses to do anything about the growth and this epidemic of illegal cheap cigarettes, notwithstanding that that right now is probably the single biggest health hazard to young people in this province, their access to these cheap cigarettes. Think about it. It could be the single largest health risk to young people in this province today, yet the government won't move. Rather, we get this kind of stuff that is, as Mr. Yakabuski says, cosmetics, merely symbolic. It's going to cost a fortune to put into action.

Young lawyers will mature, retire and die during the course of these lawsuits. They will have Montblanc pens coming out of their ears. They'll have high-end Prada

handbags thrown all over the place because, when they get tired of the colour, they'll just throw it away. They won't even drive North American-made vehicles, even though—if you want to spend a lot of money on a car and get a good product, go out and buy a Cadillac, a Buick, any number of things. Ask Jim Bradley; he drives a Buick. He's driven one for a good number of years now, a high-end North American car.

The lawyers are going to make a fortune. The government's going to look good and feel good, it thinks. Meanwhile, this legislation will do nothing, not a thing, not a single thing to reduce the consumption, the use of one cigarette by one young person. And that's what I find regrettable.

We've got to take this issue far more seriously. One, we've got to make sure our tobacco farmers, a multi-generational industry, people who've worked hard, the salt of the earth in this province, are properly assisted in their transformation over into other products.

Two, we've got to help the corner stores overcome the plight that they've been put into—the law-abiding corner stores. I say that one of the additional ways of doing this is by increasing the commission they earn on lottery tickets. I don't know why this government and the OLG haven't been more proactive in that regard, understanding that the corner stores need that revenue to survive.

Three, rather than the sort of symbolic stuff that's going to make lawyers rich, and I suppose, at the end of the day, I don't know—there are lawyers here; maybe they deserve to be rich. I suppose if they work the hours and bill them, they should be. But we've got to become really active about ending smoking and the deaths and the injuries caused by it here in the province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Further debate?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to speak on Bill 155, An Act to permit the Province to recover damages and health care costs incurred because of tobacco related diseases and to make a complementary amendment to the Limitations Act, 2002.

I'm very pleased to rise in the House to speak to this bill. My experience in politics has been made memorable just with the legislation around tobacco use. I worked with Bob Chiarelli, mayor of Ottawa; Robert Cushman, the medical officer of health, now the CEO of the Champlain LHIN; and Alex Munter, who was the chair of the social services committee and is now the chair of the Youth Services Bureau. We struggled through in 2001 and 2002 to bring in the smoke-free Ottawa bylaw, which, at that time, was certainly a move forward for any city in this province. Now we can see, five or six years later, that—we can talk about not having made much progress; we've made a great deal of progress. You can go into a restaurant or a bar now, a public place, and you don't have to put up with all the second-hand smoke. What a difference. I was in another country just two years ago and waiting in the air terminal, which still allowed smoking at all levels, was just a terrible

experience. So we've come a long way. Just think that maybe 20 years ago you could smoke in an airplane. What a terrible thing to think that you could smoke in an airplane today. So we've made a lot of progress in the anti-smoking area.

I was on the finance and economic affairs committee when we brought in the smoke-free Ontario legislation. I'll always be proud of the amendment brought in before third reading which removed tobacco advertising from retail stores in Ontario. I know that it has been difficult for the small mom-and-pop shops that had to make the changes, but those changes were made for the children. About \$40 million was spent on a yearly basis at that time just in Ontario with the power walls. That's what the merchants got for the power walls which they had in there: \$40 million from the tobacco companies. What was that for? That was to make cigarettes something that our kids would want, trying to recruit new smokers as other smokers died, and to bring people back who had quit smoking. So that whole last bit of advertising was taken out of the stores. That has been a great step forward. We'll see as the years go by that that is reducing the smoking by our children, our youth.

I remember working with Minister Wilkinson and Minister Fonseca at that time, and we went across the province in the hearings. It was a very difficult piece of legislation, but I was very proud on May 31, 2008, when those power walls finally came down—that \$46 million of advertising targeted at youth across this province came out of those stores.

In Ottawa, we had Exposé, and the students ran this organization by themselves. Some 23,000 students signed cards to the Premier of Ontario asking him to get rid of those power walls. About 10 of them came down from schools in my riding, came to Toronto and met with Minister Smitherman. At the end of that day, these students and all the others across Ontario, through their hard work three years ago, were able to convince the politicians at this level. I remember that the NDP was concerned that we were doing it in 2008; they wanted it done right away in 2005 or 2006. But we got to it. That advertising is now out of the stores.

I'm pleased with Bill 155. It's another step in the long process of reducing cigarette smoking. It has been done in other countries. Smoking costs the health care system \$1.6 billion each year in Ontario. That's equivalent to 500,000 hospital days each year. Similar legislation in the US resulted in payments of \$206 billion by 40 tobacco companies to the States. This legislation will allow our government to sue for health care costs that Ontario taxpayers have borne due to the alleged wrongdoing committed by tobacco companies—damages that occurred largely in the past. What were those damages? Well, saying that light cigarettes were safe, things like that; targeting children in their advertising and marketing; conspiring to suppress research on the risks of smoking; conspiring to invalidate the public warnings on the risks of smoking. I think it may be not unlike today when you see ads on television saying “clean coal.” We

know there's no clean coal, but the advertising there comes out and says that. Maybe the actions of the chemical companies with pesticides may be subject to the same type of legislation down the road. It took so many years, 30 or 40 or 50 years, to establish the fact that smoking did cause a lot of health issues. So this is the next step; it's good legislation. It may give work to the lawyers; that's not so bad. But it will certainly go forward in the direction that we want to, as a government. As the Liberal Party, we want to make sure that we take every step possible to reduce smoking in Ontario.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lou Rinaldi): Questions and comments? Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: Bill 155 is another bill for which I may need a little more time than I am allowed. I'll tell you what it is. The title covers a lot of it; I'll be honest to say that. The title of Bill 155 is An Act to permit the Province to recover damages and health care costs incurred because of tobacco-related diseases and to make a complementary amendment to the Limitations Act—“limitations” meaning, in law, that you can go back in history to extract money from the industry, I suppose, and others associated with it. It could be the small corner store that may have made a few dollars on it. It could be going back and getting all of those people. They've got their hand in your pocket—be forewarned—on this particular bill.

But I think there's really a more substantive discussion that should occur here, and one point that I want to make as I move along through this bill is—pardon me, my throat is hurting. I am waiting for a glass of water. But on Bill 155, which I have previously commented on, one of the things that stuck out in my mind as I looked through—the budget is tomorrow, as you know, and I expect there will be increases, as they have in everything else. They're probably going to increase the tax on tobacco and stuff like that. If they were really serious about dealing with this—and I know they've had a war on tobacco; I get that, they've had a war on tobacco and—

Interjection: Well, whose side are you on in this war?

Mr. John O'Toole: The issue is, as a reformed smoker—I guess we all are, I suppose—I am more adamant than ever. If they want to fix this bill, why don't they just make it a banned substance? Then the people would sit up and listen.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, no. They want it both ways. They're going to talk about all the stuff they're going to do, banning all these things. They've got this fixation with the term “ban,” and it's probably a good idea. But here's the key. In 2004, the revenue in the province of Ontario from tobacco tax was something in the order of \$1.7 billion. That's a considerable amount of money. Now, if you look at the revenue statement—the budget's tomorrow; I've just looked at the recent numbers—it's about \$1.1 billion. Now, the government would interpret this as saying that the revenue is down, and they would attribute that to fewer people smoking. No, no, no, wrong

data. The issue here is the illegal or contraband cigarettes; 50% of all the revenue—and remember, there's about \$600 million less in revenue. This does not equate to fewer smokers. What it equates to is an increase in the underground economy. That \$500 million or \$600 million is available to the McGuinty government today, this afternoon, if they just enforce the laws that exist today. That would go a long way toward smoking cessation programs. On this side of the House, we agree with the stopping of smoking and providing cessation programs and other kinds of education and supports for people who are trying to stop these things.

But the real issue there is that they are going to interpret this revenue decrease as attributed to their program of smoking cessation, or stopping smoking in restaurants, bars and on the street. Then you have the smoking police—they've got them out of the cars now, which is a good idea. Next they're going to be in your house. Next there will be warrantless entry into your home, your apartment. To the people viewing today, they will be coming in because somebody reported you were smoking. Maybe it's a neighbour that you're quarrelling with. Maybe you don't even smoke, but once they come in, you're going to court. Once they come in, you're paying. One way or another, you're in trouble. So if they go too far on this bill, they're going to set the wrong tone.

On the fairness side of it, this week I was in touch with constituents of mine, and my riding of Durham is a great, great agricultural area. It's composed of communities that many people here would know. Certainly in the area of Newcastle, Orono, Hampton, and I would say Enniskillen, and if you go a little bit further northeast you'd certainly be going close to Millbrook—in that area there was quite a pocket of tobacco growing. There's only about three farmers left that still have quota. I was talking to them this week in preparation for speaking on this bill on their behalf.

Now, I should say that one of the families, unfortunately, and God rest his soul—Henry Aiken was the first person who drew this to my attention: quite a successful farm operation, a successful family in the area. He always said that the exit strategy back then was in itself short-changing agriculture, because at one time it was—and still is—a legal product, that they were in fact encouraged to buy quota, equipment, buildings and special kinds of agricultural equipment. How do they exit them? They just changed the rules and put them out of business is what they did. They should have had an exit strategy, about which there were discussions. Our member from Haldimand-Norfolk, Toby Barrett, has done more on this to advocate on their behalf, and Mr. Barrett is not a smoker and never has been. In fact, he worked for the addiction research council, I believe—

Interjection: Foundation.

Mr. John O'Toole: —after he got his master's degree. He's a statistician, I believe, Mr. Barrett. He worked for the addictions federation, I think, in Toronto here as a counsellor against that stuff. But he said the fairness argument is what this is about.

So we are putting on the table one of the first challenges to the Premier and to the minister, Mr. Bentley, the Attorney General: Get the money out of the illegal cigarettes. Let's start with that. It's a low-fruit issue; I get that. Put in the enforcement mechanisms; use the law that exists today and get down to doing your job. There's \$500 million or \$600 million sitting on the table for you to take. That's all you have to do. I can tell you it would go a long way to solving some of the issues we have in the province of Ontario.

What they are doing here is misusing another rule. Now, who's going to make any money out of this if, again—it's important for the viewers; if you would like to call my office, I will send you a copy of the preamble here. This bill here is worth reading. "The act gives the province a direct and distinct action against manufacturers." It says it right in the front. They're going to engage probably a law firm—I won't mention the names of the law firms; it's not a bad word—I would say probably 20 to 25 lawyers. What do they make a year? Probably \$100,000 or \$300,000 a year—maybe more. My son was a lawyer; he was making well over \$100,000.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm hearing numbers that are bigger now. Listen up, viewers: \$100 million to \$200 million. Where does that money come from? It's actually coming from you, the taxpayer. It'll probably be hidden on page 91 of the budget bill tomorrow, saying, "Oh, by the way, we're setting up this special committee called Lawyers to Fight the Tobacco Manufacturers in Court." They will spend hundreds of millions of dollars hunting down the money, when I told you there's \$600 million on the table now. Enforce the current rules. Help people, especially the young people.

Look at the pages here today. It's such a privilege to work around the young people, but the pages, none of them are smoking, because there are good educational programs today. Very few young people—my five children certainly are not young; they're over 30. But none of them smoke, which is good, and I think the education is something that we should be spending some money on. Where are they going to be spending the money? On the lawyers. It's tragic. It's absolutely tragic that they're going to be using this money to set up this whole new department to collect the money that sometimes will take these companies down.

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"Statistical information and information derived from epidemiological, sociological and other relevant studies is admissible as evidence for the purposes of establishing causation and quantifying damages in an action brought by a person in the person's own name or as a member of a class or by the crown"—that's the key—"in an action" being brought under this act. So we're going to spend a lot of time in court.

I'm very surprised. In this bill, here it says: "The act also changes the rule"—they're always changing the rules—"with respect to limitation periods," which I mentioned before. "It permits an action for damages or

the cost of health care benefits, alleged to have been caused or contributed to by a tobacco-related wrong that was committed at any time....” This goes right back to—

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: It was 1857.

Mr. John O'Toole: Oh, before that. Actually, George Washington, when he was President—this is a fact from history—made a choice about whether he should have crops of tobacco or crops of hemp. At one time, they were both kind of products in the same category. They chose tobacco—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Hemp doesn't cause cancer.

Mr. John O'Toole: They chose tobacco—that was George Washington—over hemp. They used the hemp then for the sailboats, to make ropes and that. But it has other uses today. It's a more popular crop today. They should be concentrating on that crop, which is the marijuana crop. I'll get to that when I'm finished reading this—“subsection 6(1) of the act comes into force, to be commenced within two years after that subsection comes into force.”

“In an action that does not involve the recovery of the cost of health care benefits on an aggregate basis, the court may apportion liability of two or more defendants if certain criteria are met. The act sets out factors for the court to consider in apportioning liability.”

These are setting out the amounts and who's going to pay. Can you imagine the actuaries and the accountants, the statisticians, the lawyers? Honest to God, it's what I call red tape by 10.

There is evidence here that we should be collectively doing a lot more to educate the public and to ban the substance as an illegal product.

This is where it comes down to my constituents whom I mentioned earlier, not just the deceased Henry Aiken but another family. They still own about 230—I don't know; there's a measurement for the quota. It's not acres. It's pounds? No, it would be more than that. Anyway, they have quite a bit of quota which they have not sold. Now, they should be compensated.

The federal government has come across, and this is important for the viewer. We all realize this is bad, so they had to have an exit strategy, and Mr. Barrett was working on that with the government, I believe. And what's happened? Minister Dombrowsky has walked away from the table and left them hanging by the thumbs.

Here's what has happened. The federal government ponied up \$300 million as part of an exit strategy for persons, whether they're in Leamington or my riding—Clarington, Bowmanville, Newcastle and that particular area—to get out of the product. They would pay them off according to their quota holdings, I gather, because these quota holdings were shares, really, units of being able to produce this legal product. You had to have a quota to plant the seeds and to market it. They still have this.

They aren't growing—I don't think they grow very much anymore, in my area, certainly, because they're all bringing it in now from Costa Rica and countries that probably still use DDT. So on the product and the product quality, you'd have to wonder if the government is looking at the right side of this. They're looking at the

money; I get that part. But is there any clarity that the product is safe?

I mention this because the exit strategy comes down to this: If they don't want them to get out of it—that's maybe why they're not paying them out, but the province is not ponying up five cents. Normally, agricultural support programs are shared programs, by the federal and provincial government. Usually 60% of the money of the exit strategy would come from the federal and 40% would come from the provincial economy, which I think is the fair thing to do. I call on the government to help not just my constituents but the industry to move to producing health products, good-quality food, whether it's potatoes—because this is usually very sandy soil that they grow tobacco in—or other crops—even to the extent now that I understand some of this land could be used to grow products that could be used to create energy. It's my understanding that they could grow switch grass and other fibrous materials on this kind of land and those products could be used to create ethanol. In fact, it's my understanding that the federal government has money in a company in Ottawa called Iogen, which uses fibrous inputs to make ethanol through a process.

So there is a strategy if they'd just give them some money to get back into creating their own opportunities and get out of one and into another product that could be helpful to our environment.

But when you look at this—and it's in all cases—the real detail is in the preamble of the bill. I explained that they're just really outlining a method of going after the tobacco producers and others, hopefully not the corner store.

Now, the other exit strategy that I've not mentioned is the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association. Now, I know all members on the government side are probably just throwing them into the garbage—it's tragic—ignoring them, because Premier McGuinty has told them, “Don't get engaged in that stuff. Don't advocate for them.” But I know on this side we're getting hundreds and hundreds of e-mails from these small businessmen, often new Canadians. It's because they're called the Ontario Korean Businessmen's—hard-working people. There's one at the corner, and I spoke to Paul, who runs the little convenience store just next to mine. Basically, they've spent a fortune now on these cages or boxes on the walls to hide the cigarettes. That was a previous action by the government. So they've taken these little corner stores, who are making pennies—they work seven days a week, 24 hours a day. It's usually the mom and the pop and maybe their children who are running the things. They're working their tails off to make a living. This constituted a significant part of their revenue. So I'm going to read on behalf of one of my constituents, Paul, as well as Oh Kim Jeong, who's from the Port Stop'n Go, which is on Water Street in Port Perry; the other is on King Street in Bowmanville. Generally, the letters all have the same theme.

“Small convenience store businesses are being driven towards bankruptcy.” Oh, no, not more job losses. It's terrible. What is the government doing here? They're

spending a fortune on lawyers and the stuff that we talked about, setting up this committee and going to court, court dates, trial dates and scheduling court and court administrators, all making 100 grand or more a year. He says:

"I am an owner of a family business in Ontario. Like all other sectors of the economy, our business is not as good as it once was. There are two main factors that have contributed to the decline of our business. First, since Sunday openings of large supermarkets, our sales have decreased quite a lot. Second, a problem with illegal tobacco; it's out of control and growing in Ontario. It now accounts for 48.6% of the tobacco purchased in the province. This problem is not only a tobacco issue, it's a societal issue that we should be deeply concerned about. Convenience stores like mine are losing \$50,000 to \$100,000 in sales because of illegal tobacco. We are going to lose sales on items that smokers usually buy when they come into the store besides the cigarettes. The Ontario government alone is losing \$1 billion from the untaxed and unregulated products and all the government's anti-smoking measures are being undermined.

"Further, according to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, over 100 criminal organizations are involved in the trade of illegal tobacco, using the proceeds to fund other activities, such as drugs and illegal guns. Kids can buy these cigarettes for the average price of \$10 a carton compared to the real market price of \$60 to \$80 for legal cigarettes, and they don't ask for identification in those places at all, as we do.

"The purpose of increasing the tax on illegal cigarettes in Ontario is to fund potential buyouts of tobacco farms. This proposal will be counterproductive because it will drive more people to buy the cheaper illegal cigarettes, reward criminals and take more business away from the convenience store and revenue from the government coffers.

"My family has worked very hard to build our business and our store, opening long hours, seven days a week, to serve customers to buy convenience and food.

"The lack of action on the illegal tobacco file by the Ontario McGuinty government is rewarding criminal illegal activity and punishing me as a law-abiding business taxpaying person. I am a responsible retailer. Through the We expect ID program, we ask for identification from any customer who looks under the age of 25. I sell other aggregated products, such as lottery tickets and magazines, and my staff is trained to handle these products in a responsible manner.

"In your upcoming budget, please enact policies to stop illegal trade in tobacco. Instead of giving billions to large corporations, please help convenience store owners, punish criminals, protect our health and recoup the \$1 billion you've lost in tobacco taxes."

This is just the tip of the iceberg. They've got it all wrong here. Everybody on this side agrees: tobacco, cigarettes—not good. The strategy—all bad. I think there's more to be done on this bill. I hope it goes to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lou Rinaldi): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: This is an attempt, really, to ensure that the billions of dollars that have been heaped upon the people of Canada and really the world—the tobacco companies knowingly did this for decades and decades. They knew. You've all seen the documentaries. You've seen the 60 Minutes documentaries on American television and the Canadian documentaries that basically outline the systematic deception in trying to tell people that cigarette smoking did not cause cancer and that they, in fact, had a plan to addict people to tobacco and hide the facts. As you know, there have been lawsuits all across North America and especially in the States, where money has been recouped, because ultimately what this is about is the incredible devastation to so many human beings as a result of being addicted to this destructive drug that has killed so many people. I know 16,000 people a year die from tobacco-related diseases. These companies were hiding that fact; day after day hiding these facts from people and making billions of dollars selling a killer drug to people. That's what they were doing. And you know what happens: Every time there's an attempt to take on these tobacco companies, to recoup some of these costs, to take care of the incredible health care needs of people, it has been a brick wall. This is an attempt to recoup some of those dollars from these companies that knowingly and willingly deceived the world.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lou Rinaldi): Questions and comments.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I'm pleased to comment as usual on my good friend and colleague the member from Durham. He makes some excellent points, and I particularly like him drawing attention to the plight of many of our new immigrants who are operating stores as sole proprietors with their families. I've seen them when they work. They work not 40 hours a week, not 60 but even longer. It takes that kind of time in order to make a living at these stores.

One thing that really strikes me is that many of the people who come to our country and are sole proprietors in these small little variety stores—and I used to smoke, so I spent a lot of time in them up to three or four years ago—come from countries that are ravaged by violence, are lawless, and they've come here because they believed that Canada was a country where the rule of law prevailed. I've always thought so, too. But in the case of illegal cigarettes, that is not true.

This government has allowed and turned a blind eye to the mobs running illegal cigarettes in this country. I don't know why they've done it, but I am really concerned.

So our new immigrants who came to this country, believing in the rule of law and hoping for a better life, see the same type of corruption that they left in their other country. Why? I don't know, but I am concerned. It's a bad example.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lou Rinaldi): Questions and comments.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: A number of issues have been raised today with regard to tobacco and health. I might, with your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, just bring perhaps a personal and medical perspective to the whole idea of tobacco and tobacco enforcement.

As was mentioned by my honourable colleague from Eglinton—Lawrence, yes, there was a concerted effort by industry to actually talk and entice and lure and perhaps blur the effects of tobacco. Unfortunately, it seems it took an entire generation of individuals to suffer with not only things that we perhaps hear about on a regular basis, things like lung cancer, but also perhaps what's a much more dreaded disease, from my perspective, in that it leads to ongoing chronic suffering, and that of course, as you'll know, is COPD or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease—basically things like emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

I can say that I think it's important for us, as a government, as stewards of the public good, as stewards of public health, to do all that we can to enforce and bring the best practices of health care to this particular domain. Of course, it doesn't only stop at tobacco, although that is the issue of the moment that we're speaking about today. I can tell you, for example, that for individuals who take up smoking, it is, as you know and appreciate, a chemical addiction. The statistics scientifically are that a good, well-inhaled puff of a cigarette actually affects the human brain faster than an intravenous injection of heroin, in something underneath seven seconds. Hopefully, the pages who are looking at me quite alarmed—I'm not sure why. Don't you young people actually try this kind of stuff, because it's extraordinarily addictive. It is a wonderful drug delivery device that was designed at billions of dollars of expense, and any effort that we can make collectively to remedy this and rid society of it is welcome.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lou Rinaldi): The member for Durham has two minutes to respond.

Mr. John O'Toole: I certainly could use more time. I thank the member from Eglinton—Lawrence, who's always contributing to the debate. The member from Cambridge, as a reformed smoker, as a lawyer and a person committed to social justice, I'm proud to have him as a friend and a seatmate. The member from Etobicoke North, a doctor—I did listen to what he had to say. He should be the Minister of Health; I am so surprised that he's not. I think he thinks he should be the Minister of Health, too, but that's a whole other debate.

I would say this, though: We're missing the point. The point here is that they're setting up a bureaucratic structure. This isn't about dealing with illegal cigarettes.

For the pages here, who are probably the only ones who are actually listening, you should know this: The federal government under Paul Martin talked about decriminalizing marijuana. "Decriminalizing marijuana" was code language for saying that it's not that bad. Actually, there's a whole argument saying, "Let's go soft on it. You know what I mean? It's okay." It isn't okay. The contradiction is that we're sending all these signals that smoking is bad and we should spend millions of dollars to fight it, and yet at the same time we're saying we should sort of go soft on marijuana. That's an inconsistent argument. These substances are bad for you, period. Take up chewing gum or bubble gum or something. But I'm saying that they're approaching this in a very unproductive manner.

It troubles me to see that we're here for the right reasons, all members of all stripes, and when you look at the bill—I wish I owned the law firm that's going to be doing the work on this, because they'll be in court with Imperial Tobacco, and they'll be charging probably \$1,000 an hour. They'll be talking about this and that and imports and rules. It just doesn't make any sense. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lou Rinaldi): The Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lou Rinaldi): The Minister of Natural Resources has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear a no.

All those in favour? All those against?

I think the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

Second reading debate adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lou Rinaldi): Orders of the day.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lou Rinaldi): Is it the pleasure of the members of the House that the House adjourn? All those in favour? Opposed?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lou Rinaldi): All in favour, please say "aye."

All against?

The ayes have it. I declare the motion carried.

I now declare the House adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1741.

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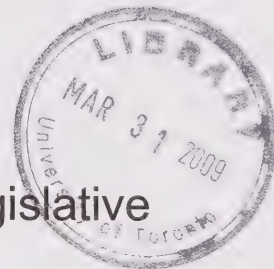
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**Journal
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Thursday 26 March 2009

Jeudi 26 mars 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 26 March 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 26 mars 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TOBACCO DAMAGES AND HEALTH CARE COSTS RECOVERY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE RECOUVREMENT DU MONTANT DES DOMMAGES ET DU COÛT DES SOINS DE SANTÉ IMPUTABLES AU TABAC

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 25, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 155, An Act to permit the Province to recover damages and health care costs incurred because of tobacco related diseases and to make a complementary amendment to the Limitations Act, 2002 / *Projet de loi 155, Loi autorisant la province à recouvrer le montant des dommages et du coût des soins de santé engagés en raison des maladies liées au tabac et à apporter une modification complémentaire à la Loi de 2002 sur la prescription des actions.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Good morning. On my way down this morning in the car I was thinking about debating Bill 155, and while I do have speaking notes, it occurred to me that there's not a lot in them that matters much, given the fact that later in the day one of the most important things, if not the most important thing, we've done here in the last year or so is occurring. In some way I would like to relate that to the bill, because the bill fits into an overall theme that comes down to the prioritization of what we're discussing here—legislation priorities.

What we're discussing, of course, is a bill that pertains in some regard to smoking. Smoking has been a recurrent theme of the McGuinty government in the 18 months that I've spent in this Legislature. It's kind of like peeling a very large onion: You can take a little bit away and there is another layer underneath. We've talked about everything from flavoured tobacco—which was a private member's bill, admittedly, but in a rare burst of speaking in this Legislature, the health promotion minister actually

addressed it. So I consider that to be more of a government bill. Then we talked about smoking in cars with people under 16 present, and we passed that. So smoking is recurrent.

This is great-sounding legislation; I have to say that first off. I'll tell my friends on the opposite side that I plan to vote for this bill. So I could, at this point, just sit down, but I think there's so much that feeds into this that I want to discuss it a bit. It is great-sounding legislation, like so many pieces of legislation that we have debated here. The Green Energy Act comes to mind most recently—still really in debate between second and third reading. It sounds great. The Green Energy Act: What could you argue with in that? We're going to fight big tobacco. This is what we're doing today, and we've done that a number of times. That sounds great. We passed a pesticides bill. That was certainly terrific. We're going to ban pesticides and we're going to save the children in the province. I heard that from the Minister of the Environment. We passed it and we exempted 98.5% of all pesticide usage. We're in the middle of a debate on cosmetic surgery so we can save some women from dying when a tummy tuck goes wrong—and I'm not making light of that. I think all of these pieces of legislation have some place. What I'm trying to underscore here is that the prioritization of these discussions, the prioritization of these debates, somehow doesn't sit well with me when you consider the problems that beset Ontario right now. So I have no problem at all with this legislation. In short, pass it, knock yourselves out; I will vote with you.

Let's just continue to jerk Ontarians around, thinking we are actually doing something in this beautiful and historic chamber that I personally think of as fantasyland. Then we can build a new building next door. What do you think of this? With more tax money, we can build a new building next door and we can call it—not the Mowat Block, we have that; not the Whitney Block, we have that—we'll call it the McGuinty block because of everything this government and this Premier have accomplished. The "McGuinty block," come to think of it, sounds like a play in football. The McGuinty block: he can do that while the team throws a screen pass. It happens every time.

Finally, fortunately, we'll get to this afternoon. The pass, in this particular case, is this legislation that you people want to debate. You score a touchdown every time because you pass it and some people out there, because they don't get into the intricacies of the legislation the way we in this chamber do, actually think that they got something.

You make smoking in cars illegal if kids 16 or under are present. Then you see a cop make the first arrest, the first one, and the 15-year-old occupant gets out while the driver gets his ticket, and the 15-year-old lights up a cigarette. You couldn't make this stuff up; you couldn't. A pesticide ban that exempts 98.5% of all pesticide usage from regulation: same stuff, different day. So sure, I'm going to vote for this bill, and every lawyer on Bay Street is going to buy me lunch as a result of it, because they're going to be able to buy me lunch for a year and never look back in terms of the kinds of dollars that they're going to generate. I bet I could go to Barberian's for that.

There is no question of the enormous cost of tobacco-related diseases. Families suffer: COPD, lung cancer, heart disease, second-hand smoke-related emphysema. Our health care system suffers, as the bill suggests—we have no argument. We have no argument, and I'm serious. Our economy suffers, just as it does when we lose taxes because half the darned cigarettes are sold to anyone who wants them, untaxed.

No one is really spared as a result of tobacco-related disease. That is a message all Ontarians should hear and have to hear. Tobacco control is a serious issue. It requires serious attempts at control by serious people, and you don't have any. You have dream weavers and spin-meisters, but serious people? Give me a break.

The spirit of Bill 155 is right on the money, absolutely. It's just the wrong time to be debating that kind of legislation in this Legislature, because we have more immediate fish to fry. We have bigger fish to fry. We have an imploding economy—that comes to mind—but wait, this bill and regulating cosmetic surgery seem to be the priorities. That's my point. What are your priorities? You see how this government does it? These are important subjects, but they're not immediate, and they're not urgent. The economy is, but they've stifled that debate—in here, anyway.

"But it is economic," you say. "We will sue those bums, big tobacco. We'll get that money." Do you know what this sounds like? It sounds like one of those cheap ambulance-chaser lawyer commercials on Buffalo television: 1-800-get-money. That's what it sounds like to me. The reality of the situation is that it is unlikely to result in any money for Ontario. So we're talking about something that we probably will never realize. The reality of the situation is that it is unlikely to result in any money. It is going to result in a lot of money for lawyers; in fact, I wouldn't be surprised if, on the day the minister announced the introduction of this bill, there was a parade on Bay Street. Can you imagine what the litigators will be thinking? It may become an annual tradition for decades to come—that's roughly how long it will also take for the government to get any proceeds as a result of any of these lawsuits, if it ever does. Lawyers love this stuff; they love this stuff. But case resolution? Not so much.

Why is it that every so-called solution this government proposes comes with either a significant price tag or a warning label that reads, "Impractical and unenforce-

able"? What does it cost per hour to run this palace, can anybody tell me? And this is what we do here because this is what the government of the day mandates. Kill me now.

0910

Illegal cigarettes sold in Ontario, for example, represent a real loss of tax revenue, perhaps as high as \$1 billion a year. You want to recapture money? Go there. The loss of regulatory control over product safety and quality—no-name cigarettes sold to children containing tobacco and insect bodies and larvae and feces—seriously. But, hey, don't try to recoup revenue by enforcing that; we might rile up the wrong people.

There are two sets of laws—at least, the application takes two forms—in the province of Ontario; most importantly, that loss of control over who purchases these illegal cigarettes. The McGuinty government had a choice to go after illegal smoke shacks, which according to some studies provide some 50% of cigarettes smoked in Ontario today, or introduce legislation that will yield nothing but the all-important headlines: "We're going to go after big tobacco. They're polluting our lungs, they're hurting our families, they're merchants of death, and they're going to pay." Beat your chest a little. Really, you cannot make this stuff up. Did I mention that you cannot make this stuff up?

Faced with the decision to go after illegal smoke shacks selling cigarettes to kids, the government chose to crack down on legal companies operating under strict regulations. When choosing who to target, (a) the small convenience store owner working hard to make a living, support a family, create jobs and pay taxes, or (b) the illegal smoke shack operator, this government chose to leave the illegal cigarettes alone. Why? What did the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association members ever do to you?

Why waste the energy trying to prevent illegal cigarette sales when the legal ones are all so conveniently located in the open—pardon me, behind \$2,500 doors that have been installed in front of those cigarettes. It's a hypocritical move, this getting-serious-about-tobacco stance the government pretends to have, first with the unenforceable smoking-in-cars law and now with Bill 155—oh yes, Minister Best supporting that private member's bill, if you can believe it, outlawing flavoured tobacco. But there was one good thing about that: Minister Best actually spoke in the Legislature—a rarity to be sure.

If Mr. McGuinty were serious about tackling the tobacco problem, he and his ministers would give some more thought to kids smoking illegal cigarettes sold in parking lots next to their schools. This is borne out by studies, known strangely as "butt studies" for the butts of the cigarettes, that prove that what they're smoking is the illegal stuff that is sold off government land. If they were serious about preventing tobacco-related diseases, they would be a lot more focused on preventing the sale of tobacco laced with larvae and feces and insects, and the government would not have a Minister of Health Promotion too afraid to answer questions pertaining to

her portfolio. That minister might tell you that she wants a tobacco-free province, but you're lucky if you hear her say anything during question period. How can a government be serious about tobacco control—

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The member for Thornhill may not make an allegation against another member. I'm quoting standing order 23(h), and he very clearly made one against the Minister of Health Promotion. I would ask that he retract the remark.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I didn't hear any allegation that was out of order.

Carry on.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you, Speaker.

How can a government be serious about tobacco control when the minister in charge of that portfolio has made a career of deflecting questions to other ministers? That's not an allegation; look at the Hansard for the past 18 months. You have to be accountable in this chamber if you're going to take responsibility. The answer is, it is not serious and it won't tackle the real and immediate issues any more than it will tackle being in last place economically and sinking fast. When you have that kind of lethargy in the very ministry that should be tackling the tobacco problem in our province, how can you possibly hope to succeed? How can you possibly hope to succeed? You can't. You just can't.

Two weeks ago, when I asked that minister about what she plans to do about illegal cigarettes, which according to the RCMP do contain these—I can't even come up with a word for it, but I'll say it again—larvae and feces, she deflected it to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Now he's a nice enough gentleman, but I don't see how his portfolio relates to larvae in illegal cigarettes. That's the file of the Minister of Health Promotion. Hence it made sense to me to ask the Minister of Health Promotion about tobacco and what her plan was to prevent these disgusting ingredients mixed with the tobacco from getting into the hands of our underage youth.

What I got in response was a speech from the Minister of Correctional Services about the great authorities enforcing tobacco use in Ontario, at a level 10 times less effective than British Columbia does. I'm not lying. You can't make this stuff up. We'll pass this bill and maybe those responsible for Liberal legislation could put something forward one day that attempts to recoup the cost of health delivery for people infected with God knows what from smoking insect bodies. That's all I'm saying.

On the surface, Bill 155 seems to be a step in the right direction. I don't dispute that. But on closer examination, it constitutes nothing except—I hate to say it—blowing smoke. No Canadian jurisdiction has been successful—none—in getting any settlements from enforcing this type of legislation. Even Mr. McGuinty rejected it not so long ago. How quickly things change when you're faced with an \$18-billion deficit, and that's just the predicted level. Wait. Stay tuned for the real number, coming to a Legislature near you in the fall financial statement. This is an act of a desperate government grasping at straws.

The 1999 master settlement agreement between 46 US states, five US territories, the District of Columbia and the tobacco industry stipulated that tobacco firms would repay \$246 billion to those governments over 25 years. Reports show that most of those governments have spent less than 5% of their settlement proceeds on tobacco control. Interestingly enough, Bill 155 does not stipulate that any proceeds from these lawsuits would have to be diverted specifically to cover the costs of health care or used for anti-smoking programs or prevention programs. So it's a “they got it, let's get it” bill—and I repeat, 1-800-get-money.

Let's pretend for a moment that this type of lawsuit could be successful in a meaningful time frame. Theoretically, the government could recover the \$1.6 billion in health care costs it is spending on tobacco-related diseases. But according to its own legislation, it does not actually have to put that money back into health care. So this is new money.

Is this measure a desperate attempt to get some extra revenue? Why would I suspect that? Is this legislation before us so that the McGuinty government can use any of that revenue to patch up the holes it made in the budget? Why would I suspect that? The timing sure is curious, though, isn't it?

What better day to be in this debate than budget day? Who better to target than big, bad tobacco companies? After all, we all hate them. Never mind that they contribute maybe half of the cigarettes—only half of the cigarettes—smoked in Ontario. Not so long ago, even Mr. McGuinty said he was not about punishing big tobacco. What has changed? Perhaps the state of Ontario's bank account?

Does Bill 155 also mean that teams of government-hired lawyers will be descending on illegal smoke shacks? After all, as I've mentioned, illegal cigarettes do constitute about half of tobacco smoked in Ontario. That's a hefty market share, and this bill does say that any future settlement would be apportioned according to market share. Right, we'll go to China and find the tobacco and insect factory: “Hey, your share is \$200,000,” and they'll just write us a cheque. Do you think? Somehow I believe that is yet another fantasy.

How is this government planning to recover the health care costs for diseases caused by illegal cigarettes when they are clearly not interested in going after millions of tax dollars—maybe a billion in tax revenue—that Ontario is losing to the government's unwillingness to tackle the real and immediate illegal tobacco problem? The McGuinty government is willing to spend millions of dollars on lawsuits, pay millions of dollars to lawyers, wait years for any results, which may not yield proceeds at all. But it is unwilling to go after lost tax revenues on illegal cigarette sales and apply existing laws designed to protect our children in equal measure with the application on legal tobacco sales.

0920

This revenue is, in comparison with a lawsuit, just waiting to be collected. All it needs is a little bit of effort, just a little bit of effort from Mr. McGuinty and

his ministers. But, instead, they circle the wagons and refuse to live by a one-law-for-all philosophy. They set up a facade like Bill 155 to show how concerned they are about tobacco abuse. I am not making this up.

It's a great opportunity to utilize that fantastic relationship Ontario has with the RCMP—and I know it does because Minister Bartolucci told me so, and he's never wrong. Over the past two years, Ontario's investigators and inspectors have seized about 62.9 million illegal cigarettes. Our Auditor General has estimated that the tax gap resulting from sales of illegal cigarettes was at \$500 million in the period covering his last report, and growing from that point. The convenience store operators of Ontario, the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association have told me that they believe, and are estimating, that it is as high as \$1 billion per year.

So I'm going to bring this to a close in the same way that I opened. While in principle, Bill 155 is a well-intentioned piece of legislation, it only highlights this government's preference for the big bang, small impact approach rather than for making a meaningful dent in the tobacco problem that besets Ontario, which is indeed a very serious tobacco problem. But you know what? Vote for it. Hell, why not?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I listened with lots of attention to what the member from Thornhill had to say about Bill 155. There were parts of his speech that I could agree with. Unfortunately, they were small, few and far between, except for the end, where he said, "Vote for the bill." So I guess I'll hold on to the end and hope all goes well.

The part that I could agree with is—he's right—it's not the kind of bill that will do anything for health promotion. It's not the kind of bill that will help people quit smoking or that will keep our youth from picking up smoking, which is basically, if you want to have a significant impact on smoking, where you have to target your energy. So there are parts of his statement that we agree with. This is not going to have a large impact on making sure that youth do not pick up smoking and a new generation of smokers don't pick up the habit. There is work that needs to be done to do this.

At the same time, this bill is here now, and we have to deal with it. This bill basically targets an industry that puts profits ahead of everything else, ahead of people's lives, ahead of a lot of heartache and ahead of staggering health care costs that have to do with people who pick up the habit and smoke. This bill has the potential to curb this, and in the long run would have a positive impact. So I disagreed with a lot of what the honourable member had to say; I agree with the end comment that he will vote in favour.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to listen to Mr. Shurman, the member from Thornhill. He is so eloquent that at one time he had his own radio program, and I

thought this morning, with his melodious voice, that he was back on the air—which he was. He was on a bit of a rant, too, for the right reasons.

When he was talking about lawyers taking advantage of the government—I think the government is taking advantage of the lawyers. And honest to fact, he outlined in some detail all of the fallings and failings of this bill. It does nothing of the sort about stopping cigarettes; it's about collecting money.

Now, the problem that I find here is the inconsistency of the McGuinty government. They've done everything they can to stop smoking. But what has happened? They haven't stopped the illegal cigarettes. This is the point: If you look at the revenue year over year from tobacco, in 2004 the revenue was about \$1.7 billion and the revenue today is about \$1.1 billion. So where did the \$600 million go? The \$600 million has gone to the illegal, black-market, underground economy. It isn't going to help people or help with the poverty agenda.

The member from Thornhill points out a truism if I've ever heard it, and that is that this is a tax grab through the lawyers—they're going to spend millions on lawyers now. But here is the inconsistency: The federal government allocated \$300 million as a transition fund for those farmers in agriculture who were in tobacco. The provincial government hasn't given them five cents as an exit strategy. In my riding of Durham, I can name three or four, perhaps more, who have lost their livelihood through government policy, and there's no compensation. This isn't the first time and it won't be the last—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you.

Further questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened to my colleague Mr. Shurman, the member from Thornhill, and what he had to say. I think his anger was palpable. He seemed to be very frustrated with this place and how business is done, but I want to remind him that the whole issue of smoking has taken a generation. I want to remind him that when I first started in politics, back in 1988 at the municipal level, one of the key issues we started to talk about in those days was how to stop and curb smoking. We called it side-stream; we called it second-hand smoke; we talked about restaurants and how we could allocate only a small section of the restaurant in which one could smoke. There was all kinds of debate. People were angry about taking away their rights.

I remember in East York, and later in Toronto, just using those first small steps. Later, it built and built until we have legislation today in the province of Ontario where you cannot smoke in enclosed spaces or underneath overhangs. I was here in this Legislature and I was proud to vote for that particular bill. This is merely an extension. Is it a small step? Absolutely; I agree with the member. This is a very small step, but it is a step that will allow the province of Ontario to take necessary legal action. Am I going to vote for it? Of course I'm going to vote for it. It needs to be done.

The member from Thornhill is right when he is frustrated, but I'm not sure that he is frustrated at the

slowness of the process, because I think we're all frustrated at that. I think he is frustrated more because many people would stand in this Legislature, and many people have stood in this Legislature, talking about the momentous decisions that they are making. This is not a momentous decision, I would hazard a guess. This is, though, a necessary one. It is just one of a long group of acts, regulations and government initiatives that will eventually, one day, stop smoking in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Seeing none, the honourable member from Thornhill, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you to the members from Nickel Belt, Durham and Beaches–East York for the comments. Thank you as well to the government for lack of same.

The fact of the matter is that the member from Beaches–East York is quite correct. There is obviously a frustration in me for having to debate a bill like this. Not because I don't agree with the bill; I have also been quite clear in the fact that I will vote for the bill, the same as I voted for the bill that banned smoking in cars for people aged 16 years and under. I try to use my debate time in this Legislature in a way that I feel can be most effective.

What I was trying to underline here, and I hope I did it clearly, is that while the bill is welcome and certainly part of the package that deals with, I'll call it "the scourge of smoking," because I certainly am not pro smoking or pro big tobacco, it is probably much like the bill on cosmetic surgery: something that needs to be done, but not necessarily at a time where this province is imperilled with much greater things than whether or not some year, some time, we collect some money—big money or otherwise—from big tobacco because of health care costs. It was also meant to underline the fact that there are so many aspects to tobacco control that can, on a financial level, recapture the money that is rightfully that of the people of Ontario and that can be used for health care or defrayment of any other costs related to smoking that it bothers me that we're debating a bill that has such small effect so far in the future.

0930

I want to make it clear as well that maybe that comes, as my friend from Durham notes, from my previous life in talk radio, where I find it necessary to rant. But I think that one of the things you do in debate in this chamber is overstate a case, exaggerate a little bit and underscore things a little bit so that you can bring to light the silliness of some of the things we do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to rise today to speak about Bill 155, the Tobacco Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act. The NDP welcomes the introduction of this bill and, as always, the NDP takes tobacco and its health effects very seriously. Actually, when we were in government we introduced the first comprehensive cancer care strategy for Ontario, and recently I

introduced a bipartisan private member's bill that will ban the sale of single-packaged and flavoured cigarillos, the cigarettes of choice for youth. That was done with the member from Brant, and we were the first to introduce a bipartisan bill.

The history of smoking is nothing short of tragic. It is tragic because five million people lose their lives each year because of it. It is tragic because the number will increase to 10 million in 2025. Most of us in this room have lost someone—a parent, a friend, a brother or sister, even a child—to tobacco and second-hand smoke. We know the physical pain, the emotional suffering and, most of all, the tragic waste of human life. We owe it to these friends and family members to do our utmost to stop anyone from taking up smoking and to stop people and industry from profiting from the sale of tobacco.

The history of tobacco smoking is tragic, because it has been known by scientists and the tobacco industry for 50 or 60 years that smoking kills, and yet we, as a society, have let tobacco companies continue to promote and sell cigarettes as desirable products. I remember, when I was young, seeing advertising on TV that said, "Tobacco helps you digest. You should smoke after you eat." They would promote all sorts of health benefits of tobacco, forgetting to mention that it will also kill you. Yet those products are still around in 2009, and it has taken government decades and decades to take significant action to reduce smoking rates. We have simply done too little to stop the epidemic of death and disease that tobacco leaves in its wake. Tobacco companies are to blame, that's for sure, but so are a range of institutions that have intentionally or unintentionally benefited from smoking or allowed themselves to be easily deceived and influenced by tobacco companies; namely, governments and medical associations, as well as the media.

But the final tragedy is that this history of tobacco is not unique. It has been repeated with other products to this day. The pattern of ignoring, hiding and denying growing evidence of chemically caused illnesses has happened and is happening over and over, even today. As Devra Davis writes in her book entitled *The Secret History of the War on Cancer*, it has also taken governments decades to control chemicals such as asbestos, benzene and vinyl chloride, while workers and other people die from exposure to those products. The problem is that we have given companies the benefit of the doubt for way too long. We have allowed companies and entire industries to introduce new products and chemicals without adequately testing and controlling them.

The deceitful and really sordid story of tobacco use is instructive. Davis shows that the link between smoking and lung cancer was well known by the Germans in 1930. This was almost 80 years ago. The tobacco companies themselves knew well of the health risk as early as 1950, but they suppressed the evidence, putting profit ahead of people's health. The same thing with the Royal College of Physicians: It delayed its 1962 landmark report on smoking and ill health due to the influence of the tobacco industry. Millions of dollars of taxpayers'

money from the US and the UK was spent in the 1970s and 1980s to develop what they would call—and I can't say this without laughing—a safe cigarette. Now, why would anybody want to spend millions of dollars doing this? I don't know, but this is how taxpayers' money was used.

US federal district Judge Gladys Kessler's final ruling in 2006 is also very instructive. Basically, she said that it is about an industry that "profits from selling a highly addictive product which causes diseases that lead to a staggering number of deaths per year, an immeasurable amount of human suffering and economic loss, and a profound burden on our national health care system." I think she hit the nail on the head.

We need to stop tobacco companies from profiting from sales by dumping the human and health costs on the government and on society, because once you pay for those costs, there is no profit to be made; there's only a loss, a loss at all levels. Tobacco companies continue to profit to the tune of billions of dollars a year while people continue to get sick and die, and governments continue to pay for the health care costs of those people suffering from smoking-related illness and disease.

This bill is an important step in calling tobacco companies to account. Other provinces have implemented legislation to allow lawsuits against tobacco companies on the ground that manufacturers failed to warn consumers about the dangers of smoking. Actually, it's British Columbia that has led the way, implementing their act in 1998, almost 11 years ago, and again in 2000.

We welcome the Ontario government's action to follow suit. Holding the tobacco industry accountable for criminal activity and civil misbehaviour is important. According to a report from the Smoking and Health Action Foundation, doing so will do many things. First, it deters future misconduct by these companies; it funds compensation for the victims; it protects public health strategy, which is the key if we ever want to win this battle; it raises tobacco prices, which we know has a direct effect on consumption; and it reduces consumption. Perhaps it will even force the companies into bankruptcy, or at least add significantly to their costs, which will reduce the despicable profits they make on the back of people's health. Tobacco companies must held to account for the suffering they have knowingly caused and profited from.

This bill is modelled after the BC Tobacco Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act. This act is important as it grants the government direct and distinct action against the tobacco manufacturer to recover the costs of health care benefits caused or contributed to by a tobacco-related wrong. It allows government to use population-based epidemiological data to prove that harm has been inflicted by tobacco. This is an important part, because if you have to show, case by case, person by person separately, how they have been affected, it becomes unmanageable. Using population-based epidemiological data will allow this to proceed.

Tobacco damage acts are important because they reduce the likelihood of behind-closed-door settlements,

because those settlements are always in favour of the tobacco industry and the tobacco company. An example of such a backroom deal is the federal government's settlement in July with tobacco companies for the smuggling that they did in the 1990s. The companies were required to pay \$1.2 billion, and that's over a number of years. That may seem like a lot of money, but really, it only represents 25% of the money that they made for smuggling. Is this really that big a disincentive? They'll still make 75% profit after—because they haven't yet—they've paid their fine.

We don't want the Ontario government to carry out a similar backroom deal that lets industry off lightly and doesn't fully consult those affected. Similar legislation in the US has allowed significant claims to be made against tobacco companies. In the US, under a 50-state settlement, tobacco companies must pay a total of \$250 billion. Those were awarded for damage done over a 25-year period.

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Ontario is by no means first off the mark with this bill, because other provinces, including Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Alberta and BC, have passed similar legislation. But it is important, nevertheless, for once Ontario steps up to the plate, the remaining provinces may decide to do so, to join in. I can tell you that British Columbia and New Brunswick have already filed statements of claim. With Ontario involved, there is an opportunity for a stronger, coordinated claim across many provinces and, I would hope to see, across this entire country.

This is not just about money. In the US settlement, there were significant non-monetary public health benefits. Those of you who were around will remember Joe Camel. Well, Joe Camel is no more. You will also remember the shutting down of phony tobacco company "research" bodies. Those research bodies were really marketing schemes trying to get kids hooked on smoking new tobacco products. It also put further restrictions on tobacco advertising. So yes, there is money to be recovered, but there are also strong health benefits and public health to be attained at the same time.

Some cynics will oppose and might take the argument that this is simply a tax grab. I can see how this argument could be made, but those members should remember that tobacco companies have reaped billions of dollars in profits from tobacco sales as they have for years intentionally concealed the ill effects of their products and actively sought to promote the uptake of smoking among Ontarians, particularly our youth. Before opposition members get their knuckles up too much about this bill—I think I'm a little bit late on this, following the member from Thornhill, but anyway—they should remember that Mike Harris himself launched a \$40-billion recovery suit against tobacco companies in New York court in 2000.

This bill is silent on the impact on tobacco farmers, even though the Canadian tobacco industry has 95% of its growers right here in this province, in Ontario. It is important for the government to consider the impact that this bill may have on tobacco farmers and work with

these farmers to cement a future livelihood as tobacco sales decline. These farmers deserve the ability to continue to provide for their families.

It is clear that there are limits to what this bill will achieve in terms of lowering tobacco use, and we should all be aware of these. Lawsuits and cost recovery alone will do very little to stop youth from taking up smoking or to stop people from dying from smoking. If we turn a blind eye to the limits of this bill, we risk losing ground in our fight against tobacco, because tobacco will continue to kill 13,000 Ontarians each and every year, smoking will continue to account for 30% of all cancers and a staggering 85% of all lung cancers, tobacco use will continue to cost Ontario taxpayers \$6.1 billion in premature deaths and disability in the future, and above all, smoking will continue to cost untold human suffering and the loss of loved ones.

Most of us in the room today have lost loved ones to cancer, and we know too well what this is like. We recognize that some progress has been made in reducing tobacco use in Ontario, partly due to some of the steps that this government has taken. But the reality is that since 2003 smoking rates have flat-lined. We have not made any more progress. Although this government speaks to the contrary and is eager to pat themselves on the back, citing declining smoking rates, in order to see a declining rate you have to ignore the epidemic of contraband cigarettes which the member from Thornhill talked eloquently about. The reality is, when contraband cigarettes are included, smoking rates have not gone down at all since 2003, although significant health promotion programs have been put forward by this government. In fact, the rate of smoking of Ontarians aged 15 and over has increased slightly from 16% and up. Groups like the Canadian Cancer Society indicate that the government of Ontario needs to take further action to reverse this worrying increase in tobacco use.

One of the first ones I would say is to quickly enact my bill, Bill 124, that controls the sale of cigarillos. The sale of cigarillos has skyrocketed in recent years. Cigarillos are what the industry calls "starter" cigarettes. They target youth because you are able to buy them in singles, often for about a dollar or a little bit more. They also target youth because of their flavourings. You can find all sorts of flavourings directly targeted at youth and adolescents. We're looking at chocolate flavour, peach flavour, all sorts of drinks from appletini to—

Mr. Michael Prue: Bubble gum.

M^{me} France Gélinas: —to bubble gum and rum. You name it.

According to a University of Waterloo study, 35% of grade 10 and 12 students have tried cigarillos. It doesn't take long after they smoke those sweet, candy-flavoured cigarillos that they don't want the sweetness anymore; they want the tobacco that is in there and they make the switch. For a non-smoking youth, it's easy to go to the store and spend a dollar on a cigarillo; it's not a big amount of money. You do it over and over, and you become the next generation of smokers, you become the

next generation of people at risk of cancer. So bringing forward Bill 124 will go a long way toward making sure we don't have a new generation of smokers in Ontario.

We also need to at least double the funding for the smoke-free Ontario strategy. We need to increase tobacco taxes, which are actually \$15 less a carton in Ontario than they are in Manitoba, and we have to take swift action to curb the availability of low-priced, contraband tobacco to youth and others; an issue that both opposition parties have been talking about in this Legislature. The spread of illegal cigarettes costs the Ontario government half a billion dollars a year in lost tax revenue, according to the Auditor General. It makes cigarettes more affordable and accessible, especially to youth and to aboriginal youth; and we all know that if our kids get hooked on cigarettes when they're young, they become the next generation of smokers. Cheap cigarettes are often advertised and easily available in many of Ontario's communities. The statistics say that about 30% of cigarettes in Ontario are produced illegally, and Ontario has fallen behind other provinces in controlling contraband cigarettes. We have seen what the British Columbia government has done and we should draw not only on their experience for Bill 155 but also on some of the novel ideas they have put forward.

For example, in Manitoba, New Brunswick, and British Columbia, they have offered First Nations bands the right to collect PST on cigarettes through innovative tax treaties, because we know that if the cost of cigarettes remains high it is a deterrent, especially to young people. B.C. and Alberta have also developed effective electronic monitoring of sales which requires store owners to pay the tax up front—a youth deterrent, and it makes cigarette prices go up.

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In closing, we need to learn from the history of tobacco and apply those learnings to better control other deadly and dangerous products and chemicals. Yes, let's move ahead and hold tobacco companies responsible for devious marketing of dangerous products, but let's remember that they are not alone. We look forward to this government's toxic use reduction action as a step toward reducing exposure to other dangerous chemicals, and we hope that it will be strong, effective and comprehensive. New Democrats will support that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments? The honourable member from Durham?

Mr. John O'Toole: I was very supportive of the member from Nickel Belt and her very patient and reflective comments on the bill. I have to show some respect. I have a lot of regard for the things she says as the critic for health in this Legislature.

She did exactly allude to the intent of the bill, but if you look behind it, if you look at the purpose clause here, there's a whole section on the Limitations Act. The Limitations Act really entitles the government to go back into history—right back, perhaps to the first tobacco farm, and tax them, fine them, sue them.

I would say it's only in recent memory—perhaps, scientifically, the last 50 years—that we've known

conclusively that tobacco causes cancer, so many of the people who grew tobacco or carrots or potatoes did it with the best of intentions, not knowing whether it was causing a human health issue. How can they, in all good conscience, go back in history? Because that's what the Limitations Act does. It says: "In an action that does not involve the recovery of the cost of health care benefits... the court may apportion liability of two or more defendants if certain criteria are met. The act sets out factors for the court to consider in apportioning liability," and this has to do with the Limitations Act. It allows them to go back in history.

That being said, she makes a very good point. But they're going to spend inordinate sums of money putting together this team of corporate lawyers—probably billing about \$1,000 an hour—to talk about smoking. We all know it's wrong. If they know tobacco is bad and causes cancer, why don't they ban it? They banned sushi.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened with great intent to my colleague from Nickel Belt and what she had to say. In the two minutes allotted to me, I really want to reiterate the point that she made about the flavoured cigarillos.

We can see what the tobacco companies are up to; we can see how they're trying to market. They understand that they are losing market share amongst those who are older, and they understand that people who are older have seen the ravages of tobacco. They have seen their friends and loved ones die of cancer, they have seen the scientific tests, and they understand that.

So the tobacco companies, in order to keep going and in order to make sure that their product continues to sell, are not looking to the people who have been hooked in the past but who have finally seen the light and got off it; they are looking to hook a new generation. And they're not hooking them with the same cigarettes that hooked the previous generation; they're hooking them with flavoured cigarillos—everything, as was said, from apple to cranberry to bubble gum and all of the flavours that a young person would want to taste for the first time and would think that it was really cool to be smoking, one of these cigarillos that you can buy for a dollar in the corner store, that are meted out one cigarillo at a time.

She is absolutely correct. If that's what the tobacco companies are willing to do to hook people, we have to be aggressive as a government. We have to be aggressive in this Legislature to make sure that we can stop companies from doing that kind of thing, but also to take them to court when necessary, to try to recoup some of the enormous cost that cigarette consumption has had, and will continue to have, upon the people of Ontario.

My colleague from Nickel Belt has made an eloquent plea, but she closed her remarks by stating that New Democrats would support this bill. I understand the Conservatives will support this bill, and I encourage speedy passage so that we can get on with protecting the people of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: This is one of those bills which you're torn over because of the possibility of success. In my mind, the possibility of success is questionable. We're going to spend a lot of money when lawyers get involved in lawsuits and go to court. It's not about getting a quick decision, as the member from Beaches—East York points out; it's about extending the period of decision so that more billable hours are put together. Anyone who reads John Grisham novels knows that billable hours are the Holy Grail of the legal process, at least from John Grisham's perspective. I think that probably he's not too far from the mark, since he was a lawyer at one time. So I'm torn between whether this is a bill that you want to see the taxpayers of Ontario fund—literally millions of dollars in chasing the possibility of recouping perhaps hundreds of millions of dollars from the tobacco companies.

Although a lot of the high-profile cases that have gone to court in the past, particularly in the United States—some in other provinces—have had initial success in winning the cases, they have lost the cases in appeal. And the amount of money that tobacco companies have actually had to pay out in this area has been either manageable or it has been extended over long periods of time, so that the company may in fact not exist by the time that payment schedule has to be.

The good thing about this bill is that it does put pressure on tobacco companies. It focuses their attention on that what they're doing in today's world is wrong. However, it may not have been wrong in the world that they existed in—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further questions and comments?

If none, the honourable member from Nickel Belt, you have up to two minutes for your response.

M^{me} France Gélinas: First, I'd like to thank the member from Durham for pointing out the Limitations Act within this act.

Certainly, if you go back, the scientific link between tobacco and ill effects are well documented and go back 80 years. In Canada, there was a landmark report in 1962, and since that date we know the scientific community has accepted the direct link between tobacco use and ill effects.

To the member from Beaches—East York, I appreciate your support. Yes, I would like to see my bill, Bill 124, which has received royal assent, become enacted as quickly as possible. Every day that goes by that those single-sale flavoured cigarillos are still on the market, other kids become hooked, other kids become smokers and go down the path of high risk of developing all sorts of horrible diseases: mouth and throat cancer, not to mention lung cancer.

To the member from Halton, there are certainly a few lawyers who will benefit when this act gets enacted and tobacco companies are brought to court. I hope that this can be done in a way that is respectful of the taxpayers' money. It's certainly not my area of expertise, but it is something that we need to keep in mind. This bill is still an important small step.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm very pleased to speak today to Bill 155, the Tobacco Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act. Although our party will be supporting this legislation, we have some grave reservations, not about this particular bill, but about the lack of action on the part of the government in dealing with the issue of stopping the sale of illegal tobacco on the First Nation reserves. It's regrettable that they haven't brought forward changes in legislation or pursued the action to stop those sales.

This bill would allow the government to sue the tobacco companies to recover damages for the costs sustained by our health care system for illness and injury to Ontario citizens by virtue of the fact that they use tobacco products. Currently, individuals can attempt to sue tobacco companies for damages as a result of illness or injury, and we're certainly aware of that. But until this time, the government has not been able to seek damages for the costs to our health care system. This bill would enable us to do so. I want to, in a few minutes, make reference to the fact that this has been tried before, when I was Minister of Health. We did hit a roadblock at that particular period in time. This bill would hold the companies accountable.

But I do have some reservations about this, because what this is going to mean is that we are going to incur some huge—and I say “huge”—legal fees as we pursue this. It probably is going to take a substantial amount of time if—and I stress the “if”—we are ever going to see results. There's absolutely no guarantee that after the expenditure of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money we actually will be reimbursed in any way. That's why I have some concerns about what's happening here today.

I would have liked to have seen, at the same time, movement on the part of this government to stop the sale of illegal tobacco on First Nation reserves. Regrettably, that is a problem that is increasing. As we heard earlier, despite any initiatives that we might have in place to stop smoking and encourage young people in particular from ever starting, we are not seeing great results and young people are not stopping in the numbers that we would want them to be stopping.

We all know that there are huge health care costs associated with smoking. Obviously, we need to do what we can to prevent it, and so we have this bill today.

It was British Columbia that in 1998 became the first jurisdiction in Canada, and the Commonwealth as well, to launch a lawsuit against the tobacco industry for the recovery of tobacco-attributable health care costs related to allegations that the industry did not disclose in a timely way what it knew about the effects of its products. The tobacco industry challenged the constitutionality of that legislation. In September 2005, the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously upheld the province's right to sue the tobacco industry and concluded that the Tobacco Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act is consti-

tutional. In September of 2006, the British Columbia Provincial Court of Appeal held that BC courts have jurisdiction over foreign tobacco companies named in BC's action.

That's what brings us to where we are today. As I said at the outset, when I was Minister of Health in 1999, we had the privilege of introducing similar legislation. We introduced Bill 23, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Statute Law Amendment Act. It amended the Health Insurance Act to allow the plan to bring an action independently of any subrogated right of action against a person to recover costs incurred to pay for insured services rendered as a result of the person's negligence for wrongful act or omission. In 2000, we spearheaded an initiative whereby Ontario filed a medicare cost recovery lawsuit against the tobacco industry in the United States under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act. This came about because many of the American jurisdictions had been successful in suing the companies and obtaining settlements. We did so on the basis that there wouldn't be any legal fees that we were going to incur unless we were successful in our suit so there was no cost to the taxpayer. We were seeking US\$40 billion. However, on August 7, 2000, the case was dismissed by the court on the grounds that a foreign government such as Ontario could not sue in US courts. So that brings us to where we are today.

I would say to you that everybody in this Legislature supports initiatives to eliminate and reduce smoking; if at all possible, eliminate it, but in the short term we have to take whatever steps we can to reduce it. The NDP have certainly indicated their strong support, we've seen this government indicating its support, and when our government, the Progressive Conservative government, was in office from 1995 to 2003, we did move forward aggressively. We worked with stakeholders in order to ensure that we did what we could to help Ontarians quit smoking. I remember that in 1998 we initiated a project to help Ontarians quit smoking. The announcement included new projects to prevent and reduce tobacco use. These projects included the Program Training and Consultation Centre in Ottawa, the Health Behaviour Research Group in Waterloo, the Commit to a Healthier Brant program in Brantford and the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit in Toronto, just to name a few. But it was a province-wide attempt to encourage and help people to quit smoking.

In 1999, in light of recommendations put forward by a panel of experts we had assembled that had convened in 1998 to study tobacco initiatives in other jurisdictions, the Progressive Conservative government of the day announced significant enhancements to Ontario's tobacco strategy. Certainly, the unveiling of those enhancements made Ontario's anti-tobacco initiative at that time, 1999, one of the most ambitious tobacco control programs in Canada, because we had assembled this panel of experts to take a look at what was going on elsewhere and we wanted to make sure that ours was the best as far as encouraging people to quit smoking tobacco. Then the next year, in 2000, we continued to revitalize Ontario's

anti-tobacco initiative and we invested an additional \$10 million. So that's part of what we did. I know the NDP are committed to doing what they can, as is this government.

We need to recognize, though, that a lot of the recent efforts, particularly when it relates to young people, haven't been successful, and that is reason for concern. If you take a look at some of the statistics today, if we have young people who are smoking at a young age, it means that some of the information I'm going to share with you is going to have a devastating impact on those young people. We know that, according to Health Canada, more than 37,000 people will die prematurely in Canada this year due to tobacco use. That is a huge number. Unless they quit, up to half of all smokers will die from their smoking, most of them before their 70th birthday, and only after years of suffering a reduced quality of life. The average smoker will die about eight years earlier than a similar non-smoker. There is strong scientific evidence that smoking is related to more than two dozen diseases, and we all know the two—heart disease and cancer are two frequently talked about diseases that obviously have a connection to smoking and early death, or certainly a decreased quality of life for those people who suffer. Most of these conditions, however, and I think this is important for anybody who is a smoker who might be watching, start to reverse after that smoker quits smoking. So there is still hope, for the individual who has been smoking and makes a decision to quit, that some of the diseases, the conditions and the decreased enjoyment of life can be reversed if you quit.

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It is concerning to know that we aren't having the impact on encouraging young people to quit that we might have. Part of the problem is because this government has been totally silent on doing what it can to decrease the sale of illegal tobacco in Ontario. We know that many of the young people throughout this province smoke cigarettes that are illegal.

In fact the Auditor General last year, in 2008, said that Ontario could reduce its deficit—at that time we thought we had only a \$500-million deficit, and we know now that it's probably going to be \$18 billion over the next two years—that they could reduce that deficit of half a billion if they were to collect the tobacco taxes. Contraband tobacco usage has grown from somewhere in the neighbourhood of 24% to 49% of the Ontario market in the past three years. This is very alarming, it is very concerning, and this government is taking absolutely no action. Also, the information says that it can be found in the homes of every one in three smokers. So in your neighbourhood, if you take a look, some of your neighbours obviously have contraband tobacco.

Last year, the Auditor General said that problems persist with smuggling and the sale of illegal cigarettes. He encouraged the government to crack down and make sure that purchases of tax-free cigarettes and cigars on First Nation reserves don't exceed their tobacco allocations. But again this government took absolutely no action. I

think in some ways the bill we are speaking to today is an attempt to divert attention away from this very serious issue of contraband tobacco and its increased use, and the fact that over the past three years it has grown from 24% to almost half of the Ontario market. That is very alarming.

Yet this government, under Premier McGuinty, sits on its hands. In fact, I'm sometimes quite surprised that some of the individuals, who are strong advocates of the quit-smoking campaign, don't encourage and prod the government more to take action on this front. How can they be happy with what this government is doing when these are the numbers that we can take a look at? I mean, an increase in three years from 24% to almost half, 50%? It is very, very alarming.

The Auditor General in his 2008 report said that government computer systems, policies and procedures are still inadequate to make sure the proper amount of tobacco, gas and diesel taxes are remitted despite similar shortcomings that he pointed out in a 2001 audit. That "is a lot of money," McCarter said in his statement, "that the province could be missing out on during these difficult economic times." He noted that the tobacco tax shortfall has increased significantly in the past seven years, and he said, "The existence of this tax gap remains a major issue for provincial tax coffers."

My colleague from Haldimand-Norfolk and, of course, the Leader of the Opposition have previously called on this government to shut down illegal smoke shacks, including the one, by the way, on government-owned land which is currently operating with apparent impunity in Haldimand county. In fact, the leader of our party, Mr. Runciman, has stated, "In tough economic times, with families and communities suffering, food bank lineups growing, this government is looking the other way as illegal activities siphon off at least \$500 million a year." Surely, Premier McGuinty and his colleagues must enforce the law. They must collect this money.

As I said before, today we're going to learn about an \$18-billion deficit, a burden on taxpayers today and a burden for our children and our grandchildren. It is unbelievable that we have gone from zero to \$18 billion in just one short year. My newspaper, the K-W Record, also found the fact that \$500 million wasn't being collected appalling. In fact, this is what they said: "And the Ontario government is misleading the public when it says it has no choice but to run a \$500-million deficit this year"—that was before we knew the truth. "Fact is, and facing this fact is uncomfortable for the Liberals as walking naked in a December blizzard, it could lay its hands on \$500 million more each year if it simply had the resolve and the guts"—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I'm sorry to interrupt the honourable member, but it is 10:15 of the clock or just past that.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): This House stands adjourned until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1017 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I want to welcome to the Legislature my slightly older sister, Susan Houghton, living in North Bay—

Interjections.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: She's the only sibling—and my brother-in-law, Roy Houghton. Welcome, Susan and Roy.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to introduce constituents of mine who are here to listen to the budget this afternoon: David and Sharon Meader from Newcastle.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I take this opportunity on behalf of page Noel Smith and the member from Whitby—Oshawa to welcome his mom, Dena Smith, and his father, Sheldon Smith. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

Seeing no further introductions, it is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Premier. Back in June of last year, the Premier suggested it would be crazy for anyone to raise taxes during an economic downturn. You said that even the NDP wouldn't do that. As we know, the economy has worsened since June. Premier, how do you rationalize what you said in June—you'd have to be crazy to increase taxes—with the massive tax grab that you're announcing later today?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Like my honourable colleague, we're very much looking forward to the presentation of the budget in this chamber this afternoon. What I can say in the interim is that there are two principal objectives we are seeking to achieve through our budget. The first of those is to provide support to families and help them better shelter during the course of this economic storm; and secondly, we want to do more to strengthen the foundation that supports our public services, generates our jobs and creates our wealth, which is the economy. So the budget will be focused on those two overriding objectives in particular: help our families today, and strengthen our economy for tomorrow.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I guess we can construe that as an admission he's crazy. Premier, that's what you said in June: Anyone would have to be crazy to bring in a tax increase, given the current state of the economy.

The Premier can use as many clichés and comfort quotes, dramatic pauses—he has unequivocally, without a doubt, earned himself the title of serial promise breaker.

Premier, once again you're breaking a solemn election promise to the people of Ontario that you wouldn't increase their taxes. How can you stand in your place, hold a straight face and attempt to tell Ontarians that this

isn't a tax grab at the worst possible time, when hard-working families are reeling from the current financial crisis?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think it would be helpful to all of us if we were to await the budget to be delivered this afternoon in the House. We'll get a good sense of what it entails, from a comprehensive perspective. I think once we have the full picture, Ontarians will be in agreement that it suits the times and it consists of the right decisions, wise decisions, that speak to our present-day needs and at the same time give us reasons to be hopeful about our future. Again, it's designed to help our families today and to invest in a stronger economy for tomorrow.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: A bully is someone who picks on someone who's already down. Ontario families are losing their jobs under this government. Over 130,000 jobs have been lost since November. People are struggling to hang on to their homes, feed their families and put their kids through school. Seniors have seen their life savings decimated. Now, Premier, you and the yes-men and -women around you who apparently don't have the intestinal fortitude to stand up for their constituents are choosing the worst economic downturn in 70 years as a springboard for a radical tax policy change that has the potential of further depressing this economy. Premier, how can Ontarians have any confidence or trust in your leadership?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just don't share the perspective and, I guess, the outlook of my honourable colleague. One of the things I want to draw to his attention and to Ontarians' attention as well is that there was some great news in the Kingston Whig-Standard today that talked about a Toronto-based company, Everbrite, that is going to invest in the city of Windsor. They're going to build a \$500-million manufacturing facility. It talks here about some 1,200 jobs that might come from this. The principal of the company specifically says:

"The Green Energy Act is a clear signal to global lenders that Ontario is serious about solar power, and that has proved helpful in our financing efforts. We have strong interest from investors both here in North America and in Europe."

The fact is, we are doing things and we will continue to do things to strengthen this economy and create jobs for Ontario families.

TAXATION

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Again to the Premier: We have to wonder if the Premier understands that his new tax is going to raise the cost of almost everything that families need each and every day, things like daycare for working families, gasoline, home Internet, laundry, car repairs and oil changes, appliances, cable TV and newspapers, and activities for kids like hockey and soccer. Premier, which of—and I named just a few—these basic needs are you suggesting that Ontario families do without because of your promise-breaking tax grab?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think that if you take a look at the record and what we've done, that represents our commitment to our families. We do everything that we can to allow ourselves to be informed by their values, their hopes and their aspirations. If you take a look at what we've done during the course of the past five years, whether it's investing in our families' schools, our families' health care, in environmental protections and doing what we can to support our most vulnerable families, I think the record speaks to a firm commitment and conviction on our part that those kinds of things are the right things to do. This budget will once again demonstrate our commitment to our families.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The cover of the Toronto Sun sums up what the Premier is really trying to say: "A \$1,000 Bribe." Premier, to add insult to injury, you're doing it with the taxpayers' own money. This is very, very cynical stuff. Once again, this Liberal Premier and his sheep-like backbenchers are treating the electorate like rubes. Does the Premier, with an \$18-billion deficit, really believe that he can get away with this type of bogus payoff?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I'd encourage my colleague to wait for the budget, look at it in a comprehensive manner and get a good sense of what it's all about. I hope that he'll come to the conclusion that we're doing what needs to be done, both for our families and for the economy.

I know that families want us to find a way together to make the necessary investments to shore up the foundation, so to speak, to invest in our economy so that it continues to generate the jobs and create the wealth to do what we really all want to do in this House, which is to provide better support for our schools, our health care, our most vulnerable people in Ontario and, at the same time, do what we can to ensure we have environmental protections in place.

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The very fact that the Premier feels the need to buy off Ontarians with their own money is an admission of guilt that this is a massive tax grab and nothing more. It's clear the Premier is shifting the tax burden at the expense of hard-working families.

The timing of the instalments couldn't be more suspicious. According to the media, the first instalment is July 2010, to try and keep Ontarians quiet when they're paying more. Even worse, the last instalment comes July 2011, weeks before the provincial election. Premier, it's as they say: If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it must be a Dalton duck. Premier, how do you explain the appearance of this being a pre-election bribe?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the honourable member to withdraw his last comment, please.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I withdraw.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Municipal Affairs, I don't need your help. Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not sure the inflammatory rhetoric is ever helpful, but let me say something: We're very clear as to what we want to do and what we need to do, and that will be disclosed momentarily when we have the budget in this House.

But I'm still not sure where the opposition wants to go, because on some days in the House they're asking us to spend more on not unimportant matters, and other times they're telling us that we ought to be making dramatic cuts. Recently, Mr. Hudak said that we've over-spent by \$17 billion.

I get the sense that, were they in government, what they'd want us to do and what they would be doing would be making dramatic cuts to our health care, to our education, to our environmental protections—supports for our most vulnerable. We're not prepared to do that. I understand there is a stark contrast in approaches; I accept that. We will continue to stand up for families, good-quality public services and a strong economy

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Premier: Today, we are finding out even more about this Premier's latest tax grab. It's a tax grab that he has cooked up with his new best friend, Stephen Harper. During a worsening economic crisis, why is this Premier joining with Harper to tax Ontarians' basic essentials?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to encourage my colleague from the NDP, as well, to wait for the budget and to see it in its fullness, and I'd ask her to keep in mind some of the things that we've already done.

For example, together with Prime Minister Harper, we're investing \$1.2 billion in social housing and affordable housing. I don't know whether she's for that or against that. On our own, we have dramatically enhanced the Ontario child benefit so that it no longer pays \$50 a month per child; it's now going to go to \$92 per month per child. We think that is the right thing to do to support our most vulnerable families.

Again, I don't know whether my honourable colleague supports that measure or not. I know what she stands against, but I'm not sure whether she stands for those kinds of things, which I'd assume that she would support.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The McGuinty-Harper sales tax grab comes at a time when Ontarians can least afford it. The province is losing more than 30,000 jobs a month. Just yesterday, 140 workers at Timken Canada in St. Thomas received their pink slips. These same workers and their families are going to have to pay more to heat their homes with heating oil. How does this Premier justify picking the pockets of already hurting Ontarians?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: In addition to those supports that we've put in place for our most vulnerable families,

enhancing the Ontario child benefit and investing in social housing and affordable housing—by the way, that last program, that \$1.2-billion investment in social housing infrastructure, will create 23,000 jobs. I think the member knows that through our Green Energy Act, we're going to be creating tens of thousands of jobs in that area as well. I think she knows as well, because of the \$32.5-billion investment we're going to be making in infrastructure over the course of the next couple of years, that represents some 300,000 jobs. I can tell you, if there's one thing that Ontario families continue to say they want, it's jobs, so our policies continue to help those who are most vulnerable and do what we can to create jobs as soon as possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This Premier has no shame. He repeatedly vowed that he would not raise taxes. In September 2007, he said this: "We will not have to raise taxes, because we are in charge. We know exactly where we are." The truth is that the Premier has no clue where he is. My question is this: Why is he making Ontarians pay for it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the enthusiasm, as usual. But I think, again, we should wait for the budget in its fullness, and we'll get a much better sense of what it specifically will do. I think that Ontarians will understand where we're coming from and where we're going. Perhaps more than anything else, what we want to do for Ontarians is to give them a sense of hopefulness and understanding that what we're doing with our resources that we have together, as taxpayers and Ontario families, is investing in supports for families today and at the same time investing in a stronger economy for tomorrow.

We've already spoken in large measure to that through our announcements that will create new jobs and provide more supports for our families. Again, if you take a look at the beginning of the consequences of our Green Energy Act, it's pretty clear that's going to be very helpful to families, too.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Again to the Premier: You know, the most insulting part of this tax grab is the \$1,000 so-called rebate. Why does the Premier think that he can bribe Ontarians with their own money?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just ask the leader to withdraw the comment.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I've spoken to this already. I'll try to find a new way to say the same thing. If you take a look at what we've been doing during the course of the past four and now five years, we've demonstrated time and time again that we are in sync with Ontario families and their values, their aspirations. If you take a look at the investments we've made in our schools, for

example, we have smaller classes and more teachers, higher test scores and higher graduation rates. We have made more spaces than ever available in our colleges and universities and through our apprenticeship programs. As a parent, I can tell you there's nothing more important to me than ensuring that my kids have all the opportunities they need to succeed and to achieve their potential. I think that speaks in very large measure to our commitment to Ontario families, making sure that we have good, quality opportunities in terms of education and skills training, and we intend to continue that kind of support.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier knows very well what this is. He's taking the hard-earned dollars out of the back pocket of every single Ontarian and then he has the gall to say that he's going to give you some of your own money back in three instalments. When is this Premier going to admit that this is just a shameful attempt to buy votes from Ontarians with their own money?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I would encourage my colleagues to wait to get the full picture and get an understanding of what this in fact entails and the consequences to the Ontario treasury. I hope that when my colleague has a good understanding of what the budget provides for, there's going to be a coming of age in terms of recognizing that this budget is going to do what we talked about it doing, which is lend support to our families today and strengthen our economy for tomorrow.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The last rebate cheque is going to be delivered just before the next election, but between now and then Ontarians are going to be coughing up extra cash for basic essentials. They realize that they're being taken to the cleaners yet again and they're going to be paying for it. Why does the Premier think he can fool Ontarians so easily?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: A couple of comments on this: One is that, again, I encourage my colleagues opposite to wait for the presentation of the budget to get a sense of what it provides for in its fullness.

Secondly, I have never underestimated Ontarians, their wisdom in making judgments when it comes to public policies and actions taken by governments. Also, we've certainly worked hard never to underestimate their values. Ontarians are ambitious, hard-working, successful people, and this budget will speak to that record of success, those ambitions and those values. We will do what needs to be done at this point in our history. We won't forget who we are, where we've been, nor will we forget where we want to go. We want to go to a brighter future in Ontario with a stronger economy that supports those good jobs and our public services.

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TAXATION

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. I would ask the Premier to answer this question for my

constituent, Alice Sheridan, who is a senior on a fixed income, facing property taxes that she's having a difficult time dealing with, escalating electricity costs and an eroding income because of our current economic circumstances. She's asking the Premier this question: Can you guarantee, as a result of this harmonization proposal, that she will not see any increase in her ability to pay the most basic bills that she is facing as a retired person in this province?

Will he do that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Well, I appreciate the question. Let me just assure my colleague's constituent that we will not take our eye off our seniors, nor their contribution to the quality of life we enjoy together here in Ontario, nor the circumstances in which they find themselves today. That's one of the reasons why we put in place a \$500 seniors' property tax credit, to recognize those needs and that contribution, and their challenge that they have today. Again, that speaks to our commitment to our seniors, and our budget, once again, will give evidence to the fact that we understand where seniors are coming from, their special challenges and our continuing support for them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Alice Sheridan is watching the proceedings today, along with many of her neighbours and family, and she heard the specific question that I asked: Will the Premier stand in his place and guarantee to her that when she goes shopping, when she goes about paying her monthly bills, that this harmonization proposal the government will bring in will not result in an increase of her daily living costs as she tries to make her way financially through the month? Will the Premier just stand in his place and say, "Alice Sheridan, I guarantee you, you will not have any increased costs as a result of this harmonization"?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I think it's important—I understand the interest, and in just a few more hours, all of that will become very clear. But I can certainly make this assurance: We will not do what has been party policy for the Conservatives in Ontario, which is to make dramatic cuts to health care. We will not do that. We know that as we get older and our bodies begin to fail us, we have much greater call upon our health care resources. We will continue to make investments in our health care system to support our seniors in the province of Ontario.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Labour. At the hearings for Bill 139, there was clear support—Skills for Change, OCASI, Campaign 2000, CUPE, the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, among many others—for Ontario to make the necessary and possible amendments to the bill following Manitoba's lead in licensing and regulating nanny recruitment agencies, including a ban on the charging of placement fees. This is a change that the Minister of

Labour himself can make to his own bill immediately. If the minister is so committed to putting an end to the exploitation of nannies in this province, why won't he stop the stalling and make the necessary amendments to Bill 139?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: First, I'd like to say to the member opposite, we are very proud of Bill 139 and what we are doing for workers that work through temporary help agencies. We're getting rid of many of the barriers that are in front of those workers, like some of the upfront fees. We are addressing many of the concerns when it comes to employment standards and providing them with that information.

When it comes to the live-in caregiver program, this is something that we are working on actively. It's very unfortunate that there are some unscrupulous individuals out there, but what we are doing is working with our federal government to close those loopholes.

I have been in conversations with Minister of Labour Nancy Allan to see what is happening in Manitoba. Their legislation has actually not yet come into force. We will be seeing how it rolls out. But what I can say—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Nancy Allan says you could make this change immediately. When it comes to protecting vulnerable foreign caregivers and workers, we need it now.

The minister's actions, not his words, show an appalling lack of concern. First, the minister drags his feet trying to pin the responsibility solely on his good friends the federal Tories. Now the minister is leaving it to his colleague Mike Colle to propose required changes through the long and uncertain process of a private member's bill. These are changes that the minister can make immediately to Bill 139. All the stakeholders say so. Why won't you act?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: We all join together here in stopping exploitation of workers. That's what we brought forward with Bill 139, to help workers who work through temporary help agencies.

Now, I have asked officials within the ministry. They say it is outside the scope of that legislation. We are working actively to close the loopholes in this federal program, the live-in caregiver program.

The member may not be aware that we do have differences between ourselves and Manitoba. Our program here is 20 times larger in terms of the number of caregivers who come through Ontario, but we are doing all we can to get it right. This will be a made-in-Ontario program to address the concerns that are out there and stop these unscrupulous agents and agencies—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

YOUTH CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Your legislation aimed at completing the transformation of the youth justice system was passed recently and received royal assent.

I think we all agree that youth must be held accountable for their actions but that youth have different needs from adults in the correctional system. Creating a framework that enables us to hold youth of all ages into one system is important, but it's just as important that steps are taken to actually remove the youth being housed in centres co-located in adult institutions. We need to physically move these youths so that they can be in places that support their unique needs. Can the minister provide an update of when all the youth will be moved in dedicated facilities?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'd like to thank the member for this very important question. As the member said, the passage of Bill 103 was the final step in the creation of the legal framework to hold all youth under one system, a very important step in this province, but actually moving the youth out of facilities co-located in adult institutions will make the most difference for our youth, and in the end, for the safety of our communities as we reduce the risk of their reoffending.

I'm pleased to report that, as of yesterday, all youth in our custody have now been moved out of units co-located in adult facilities and into dedicated facilities for youth. We are now able to provide the type of support these youth need while, at the same time, holding them accountable for their actions. We're confident this will result in better futures for our young people and safer communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I think we're all very glad to hear that all youth have been moved into dedicated facilities where they can get the services they need to reduce the risk of reoffending.

Northern Ontario has unique challenges when it comes to providing social and justice services. It's crucial that the government ensure there are enough resources placed in the north to serve the population. The expansion of services in the north also has a positive economic impact on our local communities.

I'm aware that the government is planning new facilities for youth in northern Ontario to serve youth currently in adult facilities. Could the minister please outline how she plans to serve youth in my community of Thunder Bay and what the economic impact will be?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Of course, we recognize the challenges that communities in northern Ontario face when it comes to providing services. In fact, three of the four new youth justice secure custody centres that we're opening are in northern Ontario: in Sault Ste. Marie, Fort Frances and Thunder Bay.

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This past summer, we opened the Donald Doucet Youth Centre in Sault Ste. Marie, named after a much-beloved slain police officer. And just this past Monday, we opened Ge-Da-Gi-Binez—that means “spotted eagle”—in Fort Frances, Canada's first secure custody facility for aboriginal youth.

Interjection: Why weren't you there?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Unfortunately, I couldn't be there because of the ice storm.

That facility will create 40 full- and part-time jobs in Fort Frances. The new youth centre facility in Thunder Bay will create 30 full-time jobs and 175 construction jobs.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Premier. Will the Premier inform this House who were the people who were in this chamber on Tuesday night when the Minister of Finance had his secret budget dress rehearsal?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I'm in your hands here with respect to the appropriateness of my commenting on a matter which is under your consideration.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not aware who was in here; I wasn't even aware there was such a practice. But I've learned since that there has been a practice spanning all three parties to rehearse their speech, as finance ministers, in this chamber. That's what, in fact, happened. I just don't see anything wrong with that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: The Premier has shown himself to be a serial promise breaker, and now we see that he is also a serial budget leaker. We know that day after day, as part of a concerted political strategy, major budget initiatives, including tax measures, have been leaked. Now we know that there were unidentified individuals in this chamber listening to the budget speech as it was rehearsed, while at the same time the doors were locked to elected members.

With his utter disregard for budget secrecy, why has this Premier locked the door on one of our most important and long-standing parliamentary conventions, while at the same time leaving it wide open to unelected Liberal spin doctors?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I just want my friend to know what we're talking about here. The Minister of Finance came to this legislative chamber, stood in this chair and rehearsed his speech. Undoubtedly, some other person must have been here as an adviser with respect to the delivery of that speech. That only makes sense. I gather that on every occasion where they've had these kinds of speech rehearsals in the past, the doors to the chamber have been locked for the appropriate reasons.

Maybe the appropriate thing to do in the future is to give notice that the assembly will be barred to members at that particular point in time for reasons of confidentiality. Maybe that's a lesson that we can draw from this. But again, I emphasize that this is a long-standing practice, and I see nothing wrong with the Minister of Finance rehearsing his speech.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre.

The home care sector is in crisis. It cannot recruit and retain personal support workers because of the poor working conditions in home care. The former health minister, Minister Smitherman, said, "I agree with the sentiment that says that we haven't done well enough by our personal support workers.... Enhancing their compensation, giving greater acknowledgement to benefits and to travel costs, is a very important step." Wasn't that eloquent? Let me quote again, this time from a government response to Minister Caplan's report, Mrs. Caplan's report: "In addition, personal support workers will be compensated for mileage and travel." Will the minister live up to the commitments of his government to home care workers?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague raises a good issue, and I believe those were in fact the statements made by the former Minister of Health. But it's important to understand that we addressed that. We provided additional funding. In fact, in 2006-07 we increased funding for base wages by \$30 million annually, to speak specifically to transportation compensation and for training initiatives for our personal support workers. So she raises a good point. There was a real issue that had to do with the transportation matters. We have provided additional funding for that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

M^{me} France G  linas: The transportation issues have not been settled. Three thousand home care providers, represented by SEIU across Ontario, are on the picket line. I joined 70 of them on Tuesday in my riding. While they earn \$12.50 an hour, a third of their time is unpaid time, as they travel from client to client. In my riding, that means 900 kilometres every two weeks. It takes a long time to drive 900 kilometres every two weeks when you don't get paid for it. Because of competitive bidding between service providers, agencies that attempt to improve working conditions and to address high turnover rates are placed at a competitive disadvantage. Our home care sector is in crisis.

Will the Premier end competitive bidding and ensure that home care workers are compensated fairly for the important work that they do?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let me start by saying that there's always more that we can and should do with respect to better support of home care, but I just don't have the perspective that my honourable colleague has. I think we've made some significant progress. When it comes to transportation issues, we've provided 30 million additional dollars. I think the results speak for themselves: 220,000 more Ontarians have been receiving home care since 2003. I know there's still a need, and because of the demographics of an aging population, there will be a growing need. So we need to find a way to do more. But I think it's important to recognize that we have made some real and meaningful progress, not only for families that are beneficiaries of home care but also for those workers who do such a fabulous job for our families, by making sure there's money available for some of their transportation costs.

CLEAN TECHNOLOGY

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Minister of Research and Innovation. The Ontario Centre for Environmental Technology Advancement has recently released a groundbreaking report on Ontario's clean technology industry. The report analyzed Ontario's clean technology industry and identified best practices to help Ontario's clean technology companies improve their go-to-market strategies. Over 60 of Ontario's leading clean technology companies were surveyed, and 32 CEOs were interviewed about their strategies for growth and their companies' commercialization capabilities. According to this report, world-class technology alone will not guarantee commercial success. To grow and be profitable, these companies will need sufficient risk and growth capital, top management talent, strong market demand for their innovations and effective marketing and sales strategies.

My question, Minister: What actions is the government taking to act on this advice?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my good friend from York South-Weston for the question. In the 21st century, we're going to have to figure out a way to live sustainably within our own environment, and clean technology is a great expression of that desire to be able to meet that need. Right here in Ontario, because of the work done by OCETA and the report, we can report that there is world-class clean technology that is being developed each and every week in the province of Ontario. What we need to do is to ensure first that we have enough brains, enough money and the right policy. I am assured that we have the research capacity and the generation of new knowledge. We worked very closely with the markets to ensure that we have sufficient venture capital. But particularly, we have to have the right policy.

For example, I want to acknowledge my friend the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure for the new Green Energy Act. It is a great example of how we are setting the right policies that will attract global investment to this jurisdiction and make sure that great Ontario ideas become great Ontario jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Global demand for clean technology solutions is already estimated at US\$1 trillion annually. Supporting innovation is part of our government's five-point plan for growing Ontario's economy. Our government has passed legislation that allows new businesses that commercialize ideas from Canadian colleges, universities and research institutes to get a 10-year exemption from corporate income tax in Ontario.

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Although the report says that Ontario is doing a good job commercializing these technologies, it also says that the government can do more to help these companies become globally competitive. What steps is the ministry going to take to ensure that Ontario captures a piece of this \$1-trillion global market?

Hon. John Wilkinson: We're working very closely, our team of economic ministers, to ensure that the world

knows that Ontario is open for business, that we have groundbreaking clean technology right here in Ontario and that we're open for the commercialization of that.

It's why I was pleased to accept an invitation from the Cleantech Forum and Nicholas Parker to attend their recent forum in San Francisco. I was the only elected politician who was asked to present, because those 800 industrialists, venture capitalists and researchers from around the world wanted to hear about Ontario's story. They wanted to hear about the Green Energy Act and the things we're doing.

I think you just have to read the Toronto Star today about a new company called Everbrite, which is interested in making a \$500-million investment to help create 1,200 green tech jobs right here in Ontario. And why? Because our government believes in the future of clean, green renewable energy, as led by Minister Smitherman. We're making sure that we're sending a signal around the world that Ontario is—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

TAXATION

Mr. Frank Klees: To the Premier: I want to ask the Premier, in light of the fact that he was not prepared to guarantee Alice Sheridan that her cost of living would not increase—we can conclude that it will; I now would like to address by how much.

According to reports, there will be three cheques sent out to taxpayers in this province, totalling \$1,000 a year, and this is apparently a rebate. From that we can conclude that the additional cost of his new tax will be at least \$1,000 a year. Will the Premier confirm that in fact the implementation of this tax could well result in at least \$1,000 a year of additional costs to seniors and others in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not going to speak to the issue that was raised by my colleague. I think we should wait for the budget in the House.

I know that there are many seniors who pay attention to question period. I want to reassure them right now that we will not adopt the position proposed by the Conservative Party that we make dramatic cuts to health care in Ontario. We will continue to find ways to support our health care. We will continue to find ways to reduce wait times. Now we've taken on a new challenge, which is to reduce wait times in emergency rooms. And we will continue to find ways to build new hospitals. One of the fastest-growing hospitals in the province is in my colleague's riding. We will continue to find ways to lend financial support to health care services which our seniors in particular have come to rely upon.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: It's interesting that the Premier doesn't want to reply to my questions. Would he at least reply to Ms. Sheridan's questions? But he won't do that either.

We do know that government sources confirmed last night that there will be a harmonization contained in the budget, and that there will be at least a \$1,000 rebate to taxpayers. What I would like the Premier to do—in light of the fact that his government has told the media what's going to be in the budget, would he now at least confirm for us that the rebate will be a rebate of taxes that will be in addition to any tax that people are paying today? Will he at least agree to that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I very much look forward to entertaining this question and related questions after the presentation of the budget in this House.

What I can say to my colleague's constituent, once again, is that we will proceed with our seniors' property tax credit, which will benefit seniors by \$500, something which my honourable colleague voted against.

We will continue to put forward budgets in this Legislature that provide more support for our hospitals, with more support for human resources in our hospitals—doctors and nurses—and new technologies and medications alike; again, the kinds of things that my honourable colleague has voted against.

We will stand four-square in the camp of Ontario's seniors when it comes to meeting their needs.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. It is very clear that the Employment Standards Act is a provincial responsibility. It is also very clear that Bill 6, an amendment to this act, would not cost jobs in Ontario but would protect workers' earned pay, severance and vacation pay during a layoff. It is equally clear that this government is not fulfilling its responsibility to the many workers in Ontario who are facing layoffs because of plant closures. CAW leader Ken Lewenza, reflecting the opinion of laid-off workers, said it best yesterday—and I believe that many workers would like to see that kiss.

When will this government stop being passive letter-writers, stop blaming everyone else, and finally take action to fulfill its responsibility to protect Ontario workers?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Let's be clear that our government is concerned with the rights of employees when the employer is facing receivership or bankruptcy. Let's also be clear that the solution is not what the NDP is advocating for, which is a tax on all Ontario businesses. That is definitely not the answer, I say. Instead, the answer is to work with the federal government to change the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and to ask them to enrich the wage earner protection program. The solution is to move workers from the bottom to the top when it comes to bankruptcy and insolvency. That is what we're advocating for, that is what we're pushing for. The answer is not what that member is asking for, which is a huge tax on all Ontario businesses.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Once again, the minister is wrong. I'm asking the government to finally show some lead-

ership. Don't wait for the federal government to act on bankruptcy laws. The tool to provide support now is right at hand. It's Bill 6. This government has deliberately forced Bill 6 from the committee agenda, from public consultation and from the implementation to protect laid-off Ontario workers.

When will this government stop playing games with the lives of Ontario workers? When will it move Bill 6 onto the committee agenda for public consultation and passage?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Again, what the member is proposing is a huge tax on Ontario businesses, which would have the complete opposite effect of what we're trying to do here, which is create jobs. He would cost Ontarians thousands of jobs.

Let's be clear also on this: We are asking the federal government to change the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act. We want to move those employees from the back of the line to the front of the line, to make sure that they get super-creditor status. I would hope that the NDP and the Conservatives would support this. This would be the right move.

VOLUNTEERS

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Minister, it is no secret that Ontario is currently caught up in a world economic challenge. When economic times are tough, people often begin to look outside of their homes for help and assistance. Ontarians turn to government, social organizations, not-for-profit agencies and faith-based organizations to find the tools, support and resources they need to weather this current economic storm.

Minister, you often rise in the Legislature and tell us your ministry recognizes that close to five million Ontarians volunteer annually in the province, but you have not told us how your ministry works to support these organizations which rely on volunteers in their day-to-day operations.

Hon. Michael Chan: My thanks to the honourable member for raising this important question.

The honourable member is correct: During times of economic hardship, volunteers and the organizations on whose behalf they work become more important than ever. Non-profit organizations are often caught between a rock and a hard place: Charitable donations decrease at the very time when demands for services are at their highest. For this reason, my ministry is committed to helping these organizations provide the services Ontarians rely on.

Since 2003, my ministry has invested annually in a strategic partnership initiative which helps non-profit organizations better manage their risks and improve their governance structures, and has invested in numerous social enterprises. We believe that promoting volunteerism and helping non-profit organizations will help Ontario move forward.

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to learn about the strategic partnership initiative and how many people the non-profit sector employs here in Ontario. Minister, like most members here, I know that the promotion and support of volunteerism is the responsibility of your ministry. However, how does the wider government rely on volunteers to deliver programming and services? Is there a measurable economic benefit for our volunteers' work?

Hon. Michael Chan: Again, my thanks to the honourable member from Huron-Bruce. She is a true supporter of Ontario volunteers, and I would like to thank her for attending the Volunteer Service Awards ceremony in her riding.

The provincial government, like all governments in Canada, relies heavily on volunteers for the delivery of programs and services. In fact, over 200 government programs, valued at \$5.6 billion annually, are delivered through the dedication and hard work of volunteers. When one adds up all the contributions of volunteers to this province, there is an economic benefit of over \$10 billion annually. Ontario's non-profit sector is important to the province at any time, but during times of economic hardship, and as part of our moving forward plan, it is simply vital.

TAXATION

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Premier. Premier, I've received many e-mails and calls about your new proposed tax, and I'm just wondering if the Premier can advise the Legislature what businesses he consulted with before he brought in this new harmonized sales tax.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: What I can say to the members, the e-mailers and the callers is that we will be providing this budget later on this afternoon in the assembly.

But I think my colleague knows that there are in fact many, many businesses—in fact, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce I think is most noteworthy, along with many economists, in saying that a single sales tax is a model that we should adopt. I think my colleague is aware of that.

Again, let's wait for the budget, and we will have greater detail.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm sorry, Premier, "Let's wait for the budget"? The budget has been out for days, for crying out loud, based on everything I've read in the paper. It's ridiculous. I remember a time when my father was the Treasurer, and if anything was let out, it was front-page news.

But I also wonder if the Premier caught the John Oakley radio show this morning, because I think it would be logical to consult with business about your new tax. Judith Andrew, vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, was on the program. When asked about the new HST and the leaks and the various exemptions and applications, she said, "Well,

there wasn't any consultation. I can tell you that." She continued to say, "If you think small business is in favour of it, we have members that have concerns."

Premier, why are you not consulting with small businesses in this province and listening to their concerns?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can't agree with my colleague. I'm not sure if there has ever been any more extensive consultation undertaken in preparation for this budget than ever before. I know that Minister Duncan met with countless groups of Ontarians representing businesses, taxpayer groups and social groups in many communities right across the province of Ontario. We have worked hard to distil the wisdom, the values and the aspirations of Ontarians in this particular budget, and we look forward to presenting it this afternoon.

TRILLIUM DRUG PROGRAM

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est encore pour le premier ministre. The Trillium drug program is supposed to help families pay for the prescription drugs they need. The deductible is determined by the income of the families, but as thousands of Ontarians face unemployment, they are learning that they must continue to pay the same deductible based on income that they no longer have. They are expected to pay until they are reassessed because Trillium only assesses them once a year.

How does the Premier suggest Ontario's families should pay for medically necessary prescription drugs when they are out of work and have no money?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think the first thing I'd like to say is that we're proud of this program. Not every province offers this program. There is a considerable expense to taxpayers when it comes to funding the program, and I know that taxpayers are proud to have this kind of a program in place.

The member raises a good issue about some of the challenges faced by our families who have encountered difficulties and lost their jobs because of this worldwide recession. I would ask her, as well, to wait for the budget and to see the support that we make available to our families, in particular to families who have lower incomes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I look forward to the afternoon's changes to the policies that Trillium works under. But the Stewart family in Hamilton is hurting right now. Both Mr. and Mrs. Stewart have been laid off. Mrs. Stewart has a chronic life-threatening condition and requires expensive medication. They are living off of one EI claim and cannot afford the almost \$700 deductible. This family is about to declare bankruptcy, and we all know that Mrs. Stewart will end up in the hospital if she cannot get the medication that she needs.

Given the economic situation, will the Premier agree to amend the regulation of this program to ensure that families whose economic situations have plummeted can get reassessed when needed?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think my honourable colleague is on to something here. My understanding is that the program relies on income tax data, which is collected on an annual basis, and if there's a change in that, that determines whether you qualify or don't qualify for this drug program. But my colleague makes a good point: Changes can come about rapidly, particularly propelled by the recession. So what I will do is, I will ask the Minister of Health to review that program with these particular considerations in mind and undertake to have him report back to my colleague.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Next week marks the beginning of Earth Month, when we refocus and redouble our efforts to learn about our environment and reduce our ecological footprint. One of the most tangible ways we impact on our environment is through the waste we create and how we dispose of it. While in the past waste was left to be disposed of in landfills, we now know that these ways are simply unsustainable.

Last week, I saw that new numbers from Waste Diversion Ontario have come out, showing that Ontarians are doing better at recycling. I was proud to see that residents of York region were ahead of the curve. Our waste diversion rate was 6% above the provincial average. Residents in my community want to do more to reduce the impact they have on their environment. They not only recycle through the blue box program, but we are also now using green bins to divert organic waste.

My question is, what is the minister doing to further increase waste diversion in Ontario?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Let me first of all compliment this member on being an excellent medical officer of health in the region of York a number of years ago and on the environmental leadership that she has shown around so many issues, not only waste diversion but also around the Lake Simcoe issue, which of course was a bill we passed recently.

As she knows, earlier this year we came out with the household hazardous waste program. That program alone, in a matter of five years, will divert an additional 33,000 tonnes of hazardous material that would have ended up in our landfill sites and will now be diverted so that those toxic materials will not go into those particular sites.

We will also start, on April 1, the electronic waste diversion program. That is to make sure that the toxic materials that are contained in old computers and television sets and monitors will not end up in the landfill sites. I will elaborate that in the supplementary that undoubtedly will follow.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I look forward to these new programs continuing to come online in my community. I know that my constituents will be pleased to have even more options to do the right thing for their environment.

These programs are important. They help our families to take steps to properly dispose of the waste that we create in living our everyday lives.

But there's more to it: We need to reduce the amount of waste we are creating in the first place. Waste costs us all, through higher prices for raw materials, money spent on diversion and disposal, the environmental impact of disposing of waste, the health costs associated with hazardous materials, and the value lost when products are left to waste in disposal sites.

Minister, something needs to be done to address waste diversion at the front end, to recognize that nothing should be wasted; everything has value. Minister, what are you doing to change the way our businesses and families look at the materials we use?

Hon. John Gerretsen: What we need more than anything else is a cultural change, the way in which we approach the end of the life cycle of various products. That is why we have come out with the document called *Toward Zero Waste*, which places a much heavier onus on and extends the producer's responsibility: that he who makes the product should be charged with the proper recycling and reusing of the materials that that particular product is composed of.

We've gone a long way with respect to the new programs that have come out, whether we're talking about municipal hazardous waste, the review of the blue box program or whether we're talking about the electronic waste program, but we can do a lot more. The only way we're going to be successful in this is if we all change our habits of the way in which we dispose of articles and materials that we no longer need. We all need to do it collectively. We've come a long way; we've still got a long way to go.

TAXATION

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, people were quite surprised and shocked to hear you boast about your ability to slap the hard-working taxpayers of this province, without repercussions, with your \$900 annual health tax. Do you think that at this difficult economic time you can do this again to taxpayers with your new, massive tax increase of at least \$1,000 as a result of harmonization?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We will always continue to be respectful of taxpayers and Ontario families. We will do, as well, what is necessary to strengthen the foundation of our success here and of our fabulous quality of life that we enjoy in Ontario, which is to find ways to strengthen the economy.

Again, I want to assure Ontarians that we will not do what the Conservative Party wants us to do, which is to take billions and billions of dollars out of the Ontario health care system. We are not prepared to do that. We will continue to find ways to support our hospitals, support our nurses, support our doctors, support shorter wait times, support broader health care deeper into the heart of our communities. Those are the kinds of prior-

ities we will continue to bring to our public policy-making here in government.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Premier, is your final installment of your \$1,000 bribe just before the 2011 election intended to convince Ontario taxpayers to vote for you?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the perspective that has been brought by my colleague. She has a long-standing career; she has done much good, I must say. I'm sure she would understand that in the end there is a tremendous wisdom to be found in our electorate. I firmly believe that what they want us to do is what we believe is right in the circumstances. We will always find a way to do what is right in the circumstances. Broadly speaking, what is right is to support our schools, support our health care, support environmental protections, support our most vulnerable, and find ways to strengthen this economy so we can create jobs and support the standard of living and the quality of life that we have come to know here in this, the greatest province in the best country in the world.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1134 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Randy Hillier: For six years, Elden Ruttan and his family have waited for this government for assistance. Elden has autism. His parents are aging and in failing health. They need our help.

The pressures and priorities committee red-flagged Elden's case as urgent, but that was two years ago. I have written to the minister on behalf of Elden and his family and I've received the standard form letter response: more rhetoric, more excuses and more of the runaround. Is this the true wait-time strategy of the Liberals? Wait people out and eventually the problem will go away?

I'm asking that we help the Ruttans with meaningful action, not more hollow words in empty form letters. When will this government get their priorities right and get them straight? When will this government recognize that people's priorities must be their priority? We have a duty to serve and protect our most vulnerable. Madam Minister, they're not going away and neither am I.

SNOWMOBILING

Mr. Joe Dickson: As the snow finally melts away and the spring season begins, Ontario's snowmobilers are bitterly putting away their sleds until next year. Snowmobiling is a sport that calls for strict adherence to safe driving rules. When snowmobiling, safety always comes first.

Our Ontario trails are maintained and patrolled by the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs, who are

volunteers, and, of course the Ontario Provincial Police, and they are the safest areas to ride in Ontario. Only 6% of all serious accidents occur on open OFSC snowmobile trails. That means 94% of accidents are not on our provincial trails.

This past December the Minister of Tourism, the Honourable Monique Smith, reminded us that our Ontario government has invested \$12 million over the last five years to improve the systems. This has boosted the economy throughout not only northern Ontario but anywhere above the 401 by a few kilometres. Grocery stores, hardware stores, gasoline stations, garages, motels, hotels, snowmobile outlets and sports outlets, to name a few, all benefit from the influx of business dollars. In my cottage area of Apsley and Chandos, it's not unusual to see more snowmobiles than autos pull into the gas station for fuel on a Sunday. In the famous words of that great country singer Gene Autry, "Happy trails again."

SIR WILFRID LAURIER SECONDARY SCHOOL

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm proud to rise in the House to bring great news from my riding of London-Fanshawe. Sir Wilfrid Laurier Secondary School has won an international award of \$25,000 in technological upgrades.

Out of the 300 schools that entered the contest by submitting a student-made video about why they should be the ones awarded, Laurier secondary received the grand prize. The interactive classroom makeover, which is proudly sponsored by Interwrite Learning and eInstruction, provides the school with a variety of interactive classroom tools that make learning stimulating and enriching. These tools include projectors, computers and software learning aids.

This project was spearheaded by teacher Vicky Gough when she proposed the idea to her communications class. Initially, the classroom students were the only participants, but the idea grew with popularity to well over 120 students.

Learning methods are constantly changing, and educators need the best tools to deliver the best graduates. Organizations that modernize education are some of our greatest assets. I would like to thank Interwrite Learning and eInstruction for their generous contribution, and I would like to congratulate the faculty and especially the students of Laurier secondary school for their contribution to future generations.

EARTH HOUR

Mr. Toby Barrett: I wish to remind government members and people throughout Ontario of this week-end's Earth Hour, in which we'll all have an opportunity to participate. It's a worldwide symbol of our potential for energy reduction. This will be the third Earth Hour since the World Wildlife Sydney office launched the concept to prod action on climate change, asking people to do a very simple thing: Turn out the lights.

Last year, 371 cities in 35 countries joined the show, and the number of participants leapfrogged to around 53 million. This year, 1,500 cities in 75 countries have signed on, and there is the potential for a billion people to turn out the lights this coming Saturday night.

I am heartened to see that this government is somewhat involved. The lights will be out from 8:30 to 9:30 in the evening. It's something to think about 365 days of the year. I'm not talking about sending in environmental police and energy audits and things like that.

I also wonder why there is not more this government could do to publicize. I know they sent out a three-paragraph news release, but we're looking for a bit more.

There are risks. In Calgary last year, energy use actually spiked during Earth Hour, and we don't want a repeat of that here, hence my call for this government to boost it a bit and take a bit more leadership on "no power during Earth Hour."

GREAT NORTHERN GETAWAY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I rise today to inform the House that we have now completed what I guess would be the third annual great northern getaway. You would know that every year the press gallery has an event here to fundraise dollars for various charities in and around the Toronto area.

One of the things that each caucus is asked to do is to put forward a prize as a way of fundraising money for these great charities. This year we did again, for the third year in a row, the great northern getaway. It was Maria and Rob Mangoni. Everybody here knows Maria. She is one of our security staff. She was the successful bidder on the package and got a chance over the weekend to fly to Timmins by way of Air Ontario, courtesy of none other than myself and some other businesses in our riding, and I'd like to talk a little about what she did.

We flew her up to Timmins, courtesy of Air Ontario, so we want to thank Air Ontario for having arranged that. We also arranged hotel rooms by way of Cedar Meadows. M. Lafleur and his family were good in providing great rooms at that facility. She had a great time, along with her husband.

The mayor of the city of Timmins, Tom Laughren, took her out for five hours and toured her around the city of Timmins, along with her husband. They got to visit the Shania Twain Centre, have the underground gold mine tour and others and also had a chance, with Gilbert and others, to participate in snowmobiling events on Saturday.

I know that she had a great time, and I say to people, stay tuned for the great northern getaway next year. We'll be putting together another package for people to enjoy the hospitality of the city of Timmins.

GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES FAIR

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: One of the most important roles of an MPP is to provide information to our

constituents. As elected officials, we have the resources to help residents navigate the services available from the Ontario government and also to answer their queries. It is for this reason that I, along with Donna Cansfield, the member for Etobicoke Centre, recently hosted a government and community services fair at Cloverdale Mall. This event brings together government and community organizations to inform the residents of Etobicoke about the important services available to them from a variety of sources.

Ministries, agencies and not-for-profits were all in attendance, including groups as diverse as the Canadian Cancer Society, our public libraries, Arts Etobicoke, Ukrainian Canadian Social Services, the Dorothy Ley Hospice, the Parent Education Network, the Technical Standards and Safety Authority, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ministry of the Environment, just to name a few. All participants donated their time to update the community on their important work. This information provided by these and over 100 other organizations is invaluable to our communities. Now in its fourth year, the turnout was the best yet.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that you and all members of the Legislature will join me in thanking the organizations that took time out of their Saturday to help the residents of Etobicoke–Lakeshore and Etobicoke Centre.

I also want to thank Minister Chan and his ministry, who took the time to personally attend the event and learn about the great resources and community we have in Etobicoke.

I look forward to another successful fair next year.

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EPILEPSY

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm honoured to rise today to speak on behalf of the PC caucus in support of Purple Day for epilepsy.

Purple Day is a day to bring to the forefront the issue of epilepsy. It's a day to raise awareness and to promote education surrounding this neurological disorder, which affects over 50 million people worldwide.

Purple Day was founded in 2008 by 9-year-old Nova Scotia native Cassidy Megan, who also lives with epilepsy.

Today I would also like to recognize Epilepsy Durham Region, which has taken the lead in this campaign for the province of Ontario. My constituents are supported by this great organization, which operates without traditional funding sources. Nevertheless, through a strong team of dedicated volunteers and minimal staff, Epilepsy Durham Region has worked tirelessly to coordinate events in support of Purple Day. Thanks to this organization, students in many schools, staff at corporations and community centres, and city councillors will all be wearing purple today to promote awareness of epilepsy.

Further, the CN Tower, Niagara Falls and Sudbury's Big Nickel will be among the major attractions cast in purple-hued light this evening.

Epilepsy Durham Region has also launched the You're Not Alone campaign, which urges 36,000 Durham residents to donate \$5 each in an effort to raise a total of \$180,000 to support people living with epilepsy in Durham region.

This is an important day to focus attention on this neurological disorder that affects so many people in our community, and this is an important day to raise awareness and support for the people who continue to suffer with this disorder.

KEN SHARP

Mr. Jeff Leal: In Richmond Hill on Saturday, March 21, Mr. Ken Sharp was awarded the Gerd Krick Achievement Award. Mr. Sharp, a constituent in my riding, has lived for 32 years on dialysis—my colleague Dr. Kular says this is very, very rare. This prestigious award was named after Dr. Gerd Krick, a pioneer in the Fresenius Medical Care dialysis family. He, like Dr. Krick, has been a tireless advocate in promoting research and innovation for the advancement of renal patient care.

Mr. Sharp, through the help of dialysis, lives a very full and productive life. One of his passions is singing and playing the guitar. Because of the excellent health care system that we enjoy in this province, Mr. Sharp has been able to remain close to home while being on dialysis. One of the participants at the celebrated event, Dr. Ted Toffelmire, a Canadian nephrologist, noted that the normal survival rate for dialysis patients with end-stage renal disease is 50% after five years. His longevity is truly remarkable. Dr. Toffelmire commented that Mr. Sharp's medical history of home and community-based therapy contributed in a significant way to his extended life.

I want to offer my congratulations to Mr. Ken Sharp and encourage him to continue the fight for renal research in Canada. He is truly a visionary in this field and an example of encouragement for others facing this life-altering disease.

STEFFI D

Mr. Phil McNeely: I rise in the Legislature today to pay tribute to our "Orléans Idol." Ottawa–Orléans native Steffi DiDomenicantonio, better known as Steffi D, came in fifth place during season four of Canadian Idol, when she captured the hearts of Canadians from coast to coast. As you'll see, she is in the east gallery with her mother, Sandra Toscano, from Orléans.

After the show, Steffi enrolled at the George Brown College theatre school here in Toronto, and soon auditioned for the national Broadway tour of Spring Awakening. Less than a week after auditioning, she was flown to New York City, where she was offered the role of Ilse, a free spirit who runs away from home to live as a bohemian. After weeks of intense rehearsals, the show opened for a pre-tour engagement at the Balboa Theatre in San Diego at the end of August. Tour stops soon

followed in San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Los Angeles, Tempe—

Interjection: And Thunder Bay.

Mr. Phil McNeely: —and then on to Houston, Des Moines, Minneapolis, Columbus, St. Louis, East Lansing and Cleveland.

Now the tour featuring our amazing idol lands here in Toronto for a five-week tour at the Canon Theatre that started on March 17. I encourage all members to head to the theatre to experience Steffi's outstanding performance in Spring Awakening.

As the member of provincial Parliament for Ottawa—Orléans, I wish Steffi the very best of luck in her performances and in all of her future endeavours. She is making her entire community in Orléans very proud.

Mr. Mike Colle: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Since we have this incredible Canadian here with us with a great singing voice, I would like unanimous consent to have Steffi D sing her favourite song in the Legislature right now. Agreed?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I think I heard a no.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SUPPLY ACT, 2009

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2009

Ms. Smith, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 161, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009 / Projet de loi 161, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2009.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. I declare the motion carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The minister for a short statement?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I don't have a statement at this time.

MOTIONS

APPOINTMENT OF HOUSE OFFICERS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding presiding officers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that the member for Parkdale—High Park be appointed Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House in place of the member for Hamilton Centre.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from the good people of Milton.

"Whereas Ontarians are currently denied full discretionary access to their locked-in retirement accounts (LIRAs, LIRFs, LIFs); and

"Whereas the monies within these locked-in accounts have already been earned as deferred salary, i.e., they are not government handouts or bailouts; and

"Whereas Ontario pensioners have already demonstrated throughout life that they are quite capable of prudent financial management, given that they have raised families, bought and sold homes and automobiles, managed investments, paid their taxes, operated businesses, among other successes; and

"Whereas similar legislation passed in Saskatchewan in 2002 has been successful and has demonstrated the wisdom and prudence of retirees; and

"Whereas a quick and immediate unlocking of pension funds would act as a significant and timely stimulus to the economy during the current recession;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support into law the private member's bill recently tabled by Mr. Ted Chudleigh, MPP Halton, allowing all Ontario pensioners, at age 55, full discretionary access to all monies accrued within their locked-in retirement accounts."

I agree with this petition. I'm pleased to sign my name to it and pass it to my page, Jackson, who will take it to the table.

PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY FRANCHISE

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a petition to the Legislative Assembly signed by people from Hamilton.

"Whereas Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment has the highest average ticket revenue per game in the National Hockey League; and

"Whereas the Toronto Maple Leafs are ranked the most financially valuable team in the NHL; and

"Whereas many Hamilton and greater Toronto area hockey fans are unable to attend professional hockey games due to a lack of adequate ticket supply; and

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"Whereas the Hamilton and greater Toronto area boast the biggest and best market in the world for hockey fans,

with Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment bringing approximately \$2.4 billion to the local economy over 10 years; and

"Whereas a new franchise in the Hamilton and greater Toronto area is valued at \$600 million by some economists; and

"Whereas competition in both business and sports is healthy for both the Hamilton and greater Toronto area economy and sports team performance; and

"Whereas despite having the most loyal fans in the world, the Toronto Maple Leafs have not won the Stanley Cup in over 40 years; and

"Whereas Hamilton and greater Toronto area fans deserve competitive professional hockey teams;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To request that the government of the province of Ontario express its strong support to the board of governors of the National Hockey League for the relocation or expansion of a second NHL hockey team in the Hamilton and greater Toronto area in order to realize the economic advantages to the taxpayers of the province of Ontario and to provide healthy competition to the existing Toronto NHL franchise."

I agree with this and will affix my signature to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of the member from Mississauga, Mr. Delaney. It reads as follows:

"Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I'm pleased to present this on behalf of the member from Mississauga, Bob Delaney.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole: Now on behalf of the people of the great riding of Durham, I am presenting a petition. I

have thousands of these petitions on my desk, I might add, in support of Lakeridge Health Bowmanville. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the municipality of Clarington passed resolution C-049-09 in support of Lakeridge Health Bowmanville; and

"Whereas area doctors, hospital staff and citizens have raised concerns that Bowmanville's hospital could turn into little more than a site to stabilize and transfer patients ... outside the municipality; and

"Whereas Clarington is" indeed a recognized "growing community of over 80,000; and

"Whereas we support the continuation of the Lakeridge Bowmanville site through access to on-site services, including emergency room, internal medicine and general surgery;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the McGuinty government take all the necessary actions to fund our hospitals equally and fairly. And furthermore, we request that the clinical services plan of the Central East Local Health Integration Network address the need for the Bowmanville hospital to continue to offer a complete range of services appropriate for the growing community of Clarington."

I'm pleased to sign and support this, and present this petition to Jackson, one of the pages here.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontarians are currently denied full discretionary access to their locked-in retirement accounts (LIRAs, LIRFs, LIFs); and

"Whereas the monies within these locked-in accounts have already been earned as deferred salary, i.e., they are not government handouts or bailouts"—they are their own money; "and

"Whereas Ontario pensioners have already demonstrated throughout life that they are quite capable of prudent financial management, given that they have raised families, bought and sold homes and automobiles, managed investments, paid their taxes, operated businesses, among other successes; and

"Whereas similar legislation passed in Saskatchewan in 2002 has been successful and has demonstrated the wisdom and prudence of retirees; and

"Whereas a quick and immediate unlocking of pension funds would act as a significant and timely stimulus to the economy during the current recession;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support into law the private member's bill recently tabled by Mr. Ted Chudleigh, MPP Halton, allowing all Ontario pensioners, at age 55, full discretionary access to all monies accrued within their locked-in retirement accounts."

I encourage the Legislature to pass Bill 116 on its debate on May 7. I sign this petition because I'm in agreement with it, and I pass it to page Renée.

SALES TAX

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the great riding of Durham which reads as follows:

"Implement a Sales Tax Holiday for Vehicle Sales"—how appropriate? It may even be in the budget.

"Whereas potential automobile customers in North America are having trouble accessing credit and loans; and

"Whereas the automotive industry is having difficulty selling vehicles" in a difficult economic climate;

"We, the undersigned, petition" the provincial government, in the next budget—and implement it today—to "implement a sales tax holiday on the purchase of new and used cars and trucks."

I'm pleased to sign in support of this and present it to the table.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and since this Legislature has not passed my bill since the last reading of this petition, I'd be glad to read it again.

"Whereas Ontarians are currently denied full discretionary access to their locked-in retirement accounts ... ; and

"Whereas the monies within these locked-in accounts have already been earned as deferred salary, i.e., they are not government handouts or bailouts; and

"Whereas Ontario pensioners have already demonstrated throughout life that they are quite capable of prudent financial management, given that they have raised families, bought and sold homes and automobiles, managed investments, paid their taxes, operated businesses, among other successes; and

"Whereas similar legislation passed in Saskatchewan in 2002 has been successful and has demonstrated the wisdom and prudence of retirees; and

"Whereas a quick and immediate unlocking of pension funds would act as a significant and timely stimulus to the economy during the current recession;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support into law the private member's bill recently tabled by Mr. Ted Chudleigh, MPP Halton, allowing all Ontario pensioners, at age 55, full discretionary access to all monies accrued within their locked-in retirement accounts."

I'm in favour of this petition. I'm pleased to sign my name and pass it to my page Sarah.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm very surprised that some of the members aren't taking advantage of petitioning on behalf of their constituents as Mr. Chudleigh and I are.

This petition is presented to me by Jack Logan, Laura O'Neill, Jim Park, Scott Mooney and a number of other people in the auto shipping field, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the recently passed Bill 41 with regards to speed limiters on heavy trucks was passed without considering the effect on traffic flow, safety concerns and interstate trucking; and

"Whereas the speed of 105 kilometres per hour creates a dangerous situation on our 400-series highways with consideration to the average speed of traffic flow being 120 kilometres per hour;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislature suspend enforcement of the speed limiter law until the Legislature can review all studies conducted pertaining to the effect of this law and road safety concerns; and

"That the Ontario speed limiter law be amended from 105 kilometres per hour to 120 kilometres per hour to remove the increased risk of collisions on our highways and to prevent infringement on interstate trucking out of province and country."

There is one small caveat here. It's the inconsistency with the 100 kilometres per hour versus the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. I remind all members that these are petitions, and petitions should be read as presented, with no editorializing by members.

There appearing to be no further petitions, pursuant to standing order 58(b), this House is recessed until 4 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1330 to 1600.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2009 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2009

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I move, seconded by Mr. McGuinty, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Duncan has moved, seconded by Mr. McGuinty, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

I beg the indulgence of the House to allow the pages to deliver the budget. I just ask that you keep all the aisles clear as they're delivered.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We'll have to wait for the official time count. I will inform the members next week if a new record was set.

The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I rise to present Ontario's 2009 budget.

Our province is in the middle of a global economic and financial storm.

L'Ontario traverse actuellement une tourmente économique et financière qui s'abat sur le monde entier.

Our communities are caught in it.

Many of our families and our friends are hurt by it.

No place in the world is immune from it.

We need to confront this challenge head-on, and together build a stronger future.

We know that only a strong and growing economy will create the new jobs of the 21st century.

Only a strong and growing economy will allow us to maintain and enhance our public services.

Only a strong and growing economy will help create a green society.

Only a strong and growing economy will yield a better quality of life for all of us.

Building a powerful Ontario economy is our top priority—so Ontario will act.

We are taking immediate steps to create jobs now and to prepare for future growth, future employment and future opportunity for all Ontarians.

For the past five years, the McGuinty government has been strengthening Ontario's economy by investing in the skills and education of our people, creating partnerships with business, making investments in research and innovation, cutting taxes for businesses and investing in the infrastructure that keeps our economy moving.

This five-point economic plan has led to a stronger economy that supports stronger public services.

We have higher test scores, smaller class sizes, more students graduating from high school—all of which helps create one of the most advanced and competitive workforces in the world.

We now have more doctors and more nurses and shorter wait times—giving us a competitive advantage over much of the world.

Working together, Ontario built an economy and a quality of life that are second to none.

Like other governments around the world, we have seen a serious deterioration in our fiscal position since last fall, caused by the biggest downturn in the global economy since the 1930s.

This has been accelerated by the devastating impact of the financial meltdown in the United States, our largest market.

Simply put, American consumers and businesses are not purchasing as many Ontario goods and services as they used to.

Devastating job losses are hitting many Ontario families hard.

In my hometown, Windsor, I have witnessed, firsthand, friends and neighbours cope with job loss.

I know I speak for all members of this assembly when I say that these are not just statistics.

When a family suffers a job loss or when a business closes, it affects all Ontarians.

And while no single industry or no individual government is responsible for this global crisis, each of us has an absolute responsibility to act.

The global crisis has reduced our government's revenues significantly.

For 2008-09, Ontario forecasts a deficit of \$3.9 billion. This deficit reflects a \$3.5-billion decline in revenue since the 2008 budget, with more than \$2.6 billion happening just since last fall.

Every private-sector forecast sees further contraction for the Ontario economy in 2009.

An economic decline of this nature and of this global magnitude, plus the need for an aggressive stimulus plan, means that we now project a deficit of \$14.1 billion for 2009-10.

History has shown that governments cannot simply spend their way out of recession.

Returning Ontario to a balanced budget will take time, and it will require difficult decisions.

As we move back to balance, our government will be guided by a number of principles.

First, assumptions about expenditures will be cautious, prudent and transparent. We will provide quarterly updates to the public.

Second, our government will reduce the size of the deficit in each subsequent year to this. In 2009-10, we will ensure that Ontario's relative deficit and debt are in line with most other provinces and our own historical performance. The 2009-10 deficit-to-GDP ratio, deficit-to-revenue ratio and debt-to-GDP ratio are in line with Canada today and below the United States now, as well as Ontario in the 1990s.

Third, our government will control expenditures in a balanced and comprehensive way to protect and deliver services more efficiently. Going forward, the rate of growth in government expenditures will be contingent on growth in the economy. For the past five years, our government has worked hard to keep that rate of growth and expenditure below the rate of growth in revenue.

For the year just ending, total tax revenues declined and will likely do the same in the coming year. In the years ahead, even the most optimistic forecasts do not project revenue growth to resume at the pace it did from 2005 through 2008.

Today, our government is introducing a number of restraint measures to build on our previous efforts.

This budget proposes that MPPs lead by example and that our pay be frozen for a year.

Our government is also planning to make OntarioBuys mandatory and permanent. This program will require our hospitals, our schools and broader public-sector partners to leverage their buying power and save money on the products and services that they buy.

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Finally, our government will become more efficient by reducing the size of the Ontario public service by 5% over the next three years through attrition and other measures.

The final principle that will guide us as we return to balance is equity.

All Ontarians must have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Ontario's strength comes from its people and so we need to ensure that all Ontarians can participate to the fullest in the new economy.

To confront the current economic challenge, our government has designed a stimulus package that creates jobs today and enhances Ontario's future competitiveness.

Pour relever le défi économique actuel, notre gouvernement a élaboré un ensemble de mesures de stimulation visant à créer des emplois aujourd'hui et à accroître la compétitivité future de l'Ontario.

Today's budget commits \$32.5 billion over the next two years for new infrastructure that will support more than 300,000 new jobs.

This budget increases training support for the unemployed right now.

In addition to creating more than 100,000 summer jobs for students, we will expand training and literacy programs and propose to make the apprenticeship training tax credit the most generous in Canada.

At the same time, we recognize that average federal benefits for unemployed Ontarians are more than \$4,000 a year less than in other provinces.

Ontarians demand their fair share of employment insurance benefits from the federal government so that the people of this province are treated the same as people right across Canada.

We are taking immediate steps to help manufacturing and small business. For example, we are extending the writeoff for new machinery and equipment and providing a 100% writeoff for new computers.

This budget also provides assistance to the agricultural sector and to northern communities, with investments to improve infrastructure, and supports the forest products and mining sectors with initiatives to help increase our exports.

Our budget will create jobs now all around Ontario.

Notre budget créera des emplois maintenant aux quatre coins de l'Ontario.

The next task we have is to ensure that we are ready for the jobs of tomorrow.

Ontario's economy must become even more competitive, innovative and sustainable.

The Green Energy and Green Economy Act, if passed, will make it easier to bring renewable energy projects to life and, most importantly, would create some 50,000 new jobs in the first three years.

To take advantage of Ontario's emerging green economy, this budget proposes more than \$300 million in initiatives. These would include an emerging technologies fund; enhancing the innovation demonstration fund; a strategy to help prepare workers for tomorrow's green-collar jobs; and new research dollars to promote green economic development.

Innovation is the key to unlocking tomorrow's jobs.

To build research infrastructure and support things like life science research, green technologies applied research and genomics research, we will invest more than \$700 million.

We will also invest in our successful creative and entertainment sector, helping with tax credits and support for the digital media.

Ontario is open for innovation and Ontario is Open for Business.

Open for Business is our plan to make government faster and friendlier for families and businesses while at the same time protecting the safety of our communities.

Our plan is to reduce the regulatory burden by 25% over the next two years. We will continue to work towards a single securities regulator for Canada and promote the further development of Toronto as a global financial centre.

Ontario can only move forward when all of us move forward together.

The McGuinty government has launched a comprehensive strategy to reduce poverty.

Today's economy makes the uphill trek to achieve that goal steeper and more rugged.

Accordingly, to ensure that each of us has the chance to reach his or her full potential, this budget proposes investments in people, children and families, in social housing, in social services and in low-income tax relief.

As announced last week by my colleague the Minister of Children and Youth Services, we are proposing to raise the Ontario child benefit to \$1,100 per child, effective July 2009, fully two years ahead of schedule.

In addition, the government is proposing to increase social assistance rates by 2% in 2009-10. To help families, we have raised these rates by 11% since 2003.

The budget also provides improved funding for rent banks—which will help thousands of families stay in their homes.

To help build new homes and improve existing housing for families, seniors and persons with disabilities, the government plans to invest more than \$1 billion.

When we do return to growth, these investments will help ensure that every Ontarian has the opportunity to participate in the new economy.

As a government, as a province and as a people, our attention must turn to building the next generation of growth.

The generation of growth that will attract and create the jobs of the new economy.

The generation of growth that will preserve and enhance the public services that we all value.

The generation of growth that allows Ontario to better leverage its enormous advantages to the benefit of all our people.

Getting through the challenges that face us will not be easy.

Returning to the economy we had will not be enough to secure the future that we want.

To maintain and enhance the public services that Ontario needs, we must build that next generation of growth.

This will not be easy.

It will not happen overnight. It's going to take all of us, working together.

Ontarians have a great track record of success when we work together to build a better future for our children.

Our goal is a better future powered by a stronger economy. The next step we must take to get there is tax reform.

Specifically, today we propose three significant tax changes.

Nous proposons aujourd'hui trois importantes modifications fiscales.

First, a single value-added sales tax for Ontario.

Second, permanent personal tax relief and three direct payments to Ontarians as we transition to a single sales tax.

Third, comprehensive corporate tax reforms to permanently and significantly reduce business taxes for large and small enterprises across the province.

More than 130 countries have adopted a value-added tax. Every other country in the OECD, save the United States, has a value-added tax—as do four other Canadian provinces. It is the way modern, globally competitive jurisdictions do business.

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce, many experts, research groups and sector associations have called on us to reform our tax system and create a single provincial-federal sales tax.

Over the next 15 months, we plan to implement a single provincial-federal sales tax of 13%. The single tax would begin July 1, 2010.

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Let's be clear: Overall, provincial government revenue would not increase as a result of this reform package. In fact, government revenues will be reduced by \$2.3 billion over the next four years.

Let me also be clear: This reform package provides significant tax relief for Ontarians right across the board.

We need to take this step.

It is fundamental to building a powerful economy capable of supporting strong public services and a good quality of life for all of us.

During difficult times, Ontarians expect their governments to work together. This single tax is a result of the provincial and federal government working together to foster job creation and economic growth. To support this arrangement, the federal government is providing Ontario with \$4.3 billion over two years, as well as considerable flexibility in the construct of the single tax.

We know that for some items and for some people, it will mean price increases, and that is why we will help Ontario families with the transition to a single tax.

Today I'm introducing a \$10.6-billion package of tax relief for people that includes permanent personal tax cuts and direct payments to Ontarians.

We plan to cut the tax rate on Ontario's lowest tax bracket from 6.05% to 5.05%—a decrease of 17%.

This means Ontarians would pay less on the first \$36,848 of taxable income, and Ontarians with modest incomes will now pay the lowest income tax rate in Canada.

Ontario families earning less than \$80,000 a year would see an average 10% cut in their personal income tax.

In addition, to protect low- and middle-income families, the province would also introduce a permanent value-added sales tax credit of up to \$260 for every adult and child. This sales tax credit would be one of the most generous in Canada.

Taken together, these initiatives would provide average Ontarians, middle-class and lower-income Ontarians, with an ongoing, permanent tax reduction of more than \$2.3 billion per year.

In addition to this tax relief, we would exempt a variety of goods from the provincial portion of the single sales tax: children's clothing and footwear, all infant and child car seats, diapers, books and feminine hygiene products.

Finally, to help with the transition to a single sales tax, every eligible family in Ontario with an income below \$160,000 would receive three cheques from the provincial government totalling \$1,000. The first cheque would arrive in June 2010, the second just before Christmas that year, and the third in June 2011.

Single Ontarians earning less than \$80,000 a year would receive three cheques totalling \$300.

Competing in a globalized economy demands that Ontario businesses be more competitive than ever. We need our businesses to grow stronger and to hire more Ontarians.

The single tax would make Ontario more competitive and cut paperwork costs for businesses by more than \$500 million per year.

While our proposed single sales tax will do much to increase business productivity, we need to do much more.

And we will.

Small businesses are the backbone of this economy, so we propose an 18% cut to the corporate tax rate for small businesses effective July 1, 2010—taking that from 5.5% to 4.5%.

We will also eliminate the small business surtax. This clawback is a barrier to growth. Ontario will be the only jurisdiction in Canada to end this barrier to growing businesses, and we hope the others will follow with us.

We also propose to strengthen our businesses by reducing Ontario's corporate income tax rate.

Starting on July 1, 2010, Ontario's general corporate income tax rate would be reduced to 12%—a 14.3% reduction. The general rate would be reduced to 10% by 2013—which is a further 16.7% reduction.

Ontario's manufacturing and processing rate—which includes all manufacturers, as well as forestry, farming,

fishing and mining—will be reduced to 10% starting July 1 next year—a 16.7% cut in their taxes.

This unprecedented business tax reform will make Ontario businesses better able to compete and succeed in the global economy.

Once fully implemented, this reform would cut Ontario's tax rate on new business investment in half, making Ontario one of the most competitive jurisdictions in the industrialized world for new investment.

Overall, this is the most important tax reform we can make to inspire growth across all sectors and kick-start the rebuilding of our manufacturing and resource industries.

The result of this will be a stronger economy to spur job growth, create a green economy and provide us with quality public services as we come out of this global recession.

And make no mistake: We will come out of this recession bigger, better and stronger.

Finally, I need to address three key features of the single sales tax.

To support new housing, new homebuyers would receive a rebate on this tax on homes up to \$500,000.

To help ensure that our tourism sector has the resources it needs to attract more visitors and alleviate the impact of the single tax, we will also provide \$40 million annually for destination marketing to Ontario tourism regions, once they are established.

We will ensure that Ontario's municipalities, universities, colleges, schools, hospitals, charities and qualifying non-profit sectors will be kept fiscally whole.

This comprehensive tax package is simply the single most effective step we can take to create jobs in Ontario and position our economy for future growth.

The tax reforms proposed in this budget are an essential step towards a powerful Ontario economy—one that will thrive in the global economy.

This reform will help Ontario create the wealth we need to support the best publicly funded schools for our children and the best public health care for all of our families. It will help ensure that we have the strongest environmental protection for all our communities and the most compassionate support for our most vulnerable citizens.

Now is the right time to do this.

Now is the right time to signal to Ontario businesses that they have a bright future.

Now is the right time to signal to the international investment community that Ontario is a great place to do business.

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Now is the right time to signal to Ontarians that stronger businesses will create more jobs—and more jobs help fund quality schools and quality hospitals.

This tax reform is a step we must take.

Infrastructure is important for jobs now, and it will increase our productivity over the long term.

It is not enough.

We need to go further.

We need to move forward.

And today, we are doing just that.

Speaker, after the recession of the mid-1890s, the harnessing of Ontario's rich water resources for hydro-electric power and the discovery of significant mineral resources helped create a new, more vital economy in this province.

After the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Ontario economy became more diversified and manufacturing grew exponentially after a long slump.

A Canada-wide recession hit Ontario in the early 1980s and Ontario bounced back faster than the other provinces—we saw GDP rise from recession levels in 1981 to 7.9% growth in 1984.

After the sharp recession in the early 1990s, Ontario entered a long era of solid economic growth and high employment.

Each generation of Ontarians has risen to the challenge of its day.

I am confident that our generation will rise to this challenge.

Because I am confident in Ontarians.

We have seen economic setbacks and, on every occasion, we have risen above them.

Once an outpost of a distant empire, Ontario has become one of the largest sub-national economies in the world.

The task of leading Ontario through this recession to the next generation of growth falls to all of us.

The task of ensuring that Ontario's children go further and reach higher falls to all of us.

The task of building a powerful Ontario economy falls to all of us.

We will take up that challenge confidently and with determination, just as those who came before us did.

Much is at stake.

We can do this.

Nous pouvons y arriver.

We have much going for us: We are diverse and strong in every meaningful way.

We have the skills. We have the expertise. We have the drive.

We can do this.

We're Ontario.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Member from Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Speaker, I seek consent to revert to introduction of bills.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2009****LOI DE 2009 SUR
LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES**

Mr. Duncan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 162, An Act respecting the budget measures and other matters / Projet de loi 162, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): To the minister for a short statement.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I've already given it, sir.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Government House leader?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move adjournment of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The government House leader has moved adjournment of the House.

All in favour, say "aye."

This House stands adjourned.

The House adjourned at 1635.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Brotten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture
		Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craiton, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
		Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
		Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
		Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Johnson, Rick (LIB)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough—Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches—East York	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of International Trade and Investment / Ministre du Commerce international et de l'Investissement
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London—Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland—Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds—Grenville	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme
		Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier / Vice-premier ministre
		Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton—Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga—Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services / Ministre des Petites Entreprises et des Services aux consommateurs
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (LIB)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Perth—Wellington	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener—Waterloo	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
		Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

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Gilles Bisson, Bob Delaney
Garfield Dunlop, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Tim Hudak, Amrit Mangat
Phil McNeely, Yasir Naqvi
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**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
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Linda Jeffrey, Kuldip Kular
Rosario Marchese, Bill Mauro
Carol Mitchell, David Oraziotti
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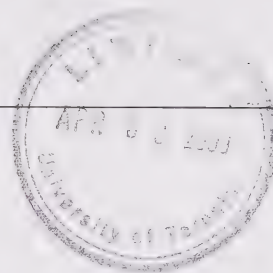
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Monday 30 March 2009

Lundi 30 mars 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 30 March 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 30 mars 2009

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a nondenominational prayer.

Prayers.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Mr. Dave Levac: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: On February 17, I made a statement in the House about Mary Welsh, who was the recipient of the Order of Ontario, and I need to correct the record. In that speech, I inadvertently referenced the four people as the nominators, and I have to make sure that it's understood that the four people who were named in the statement were supporters and wrote letters of support. Cheryl Corke, along with Lois Chowhan, were the actual nominators, and I wanted to correct that record. I hope I did not offend anybody; I had inadvertently missed those other two names. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Simcoe–Grey and page Lisa Di Vona, we would like to welcome her mother, Josie Di Vona, and her grandmother Pierina Gianetti, both sitting in the west members' gallery today. Welcome.

On behalf of the member from Brampton West and page Ahsan Shahzad: his mother, Kausar; his father, Shahzad Hussain; his brother Anas; his brother Rafeh; his friend Fayyaz Akram; his friend Khurram Makhdoom Pasha; his teacher, Marilyn Wyatt; another teacher, Brenda Potts; another teacher, Lee Roe-Etter; another teacher, Mrs. Snyder; and her friend Paul Chabot, sitting in the public gallery and the east members' gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

We have with us in the Speaker's gallery Mr. Geoffrey Kelley, a member of the National Assembly of Quebec. Please join me in welcoming our guests today.

And a special welcome to a group of guests of mine visiting the Legislature today, they are from the Golden K Kiwanis Club in St. Thomas, and other members and friends who are with them. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery, including a number of former teachers of mine. Welcome, all, to Queen's Park today.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm sure it might be a point of order that I was a

bit late to introduce two guests from London in the east gallery: Lucy Shilton and Zack Shilton. Welcome.

ONTARIO BUDGET

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On Wednesday, March 25, 2009, the member from Wellington–Halton Hills, Mr. Arnott, having given proper notice, rose on a question of privilege concerning budget secrecy and a separate but related question of privilege concerning access to the legislative chamber. The government House leader, Ms. Smith, the member from Timmins–James Bay, Mr. Bisson, and the member from Newmarket–Aurora, Mr. Klees, responded to those concerns.

According to the member from Wellington–Halton Hills, the government had been deliberately releasing budget information outside the House in the days leading up to the budget in contravention of the parliamentary convention of budget secrecy. The member referred to submissions that were made on a question of privilege concerning budget secrecy in 1983. In the ensuing May 9, 1983, ruling, at pages 37 to 39 of the Journals for that day, Speaker Turner found that, "Budget secrecy is a political convention, as is the practice that the Treasurer presents his budget in the House before discussing it in any other public forum. It has nothing to do with parliamentary privilege." The Speaker went on to add that the "disclosure of information relating to the budget has to do with the conduct of a minister of the crown in the performance of his ministerial duties." The Speaker found that ministerial conduct is addressed through other avenues and remedies, but that parliamentary privilege is not one of these avenues. In his Magna budget ruling of May 8, 2003, at page 47 of the Journals for that day, Speaker Carr accepted the thrust of Speaker Turner's ruling.

I also note that on March 20, 2008, the member from Wellington–Halton Hills raised a question of privilege concerning a newspaper article that contained information about the forthcoming budget. In ruling that possible disclosure of budget contents cannot amount to a breach of members' privileges, I made the following remarks at page 2 of the Votes and Proceedings from March 25, 2008:

"A successful question of privilege must convince the Speaker that the peculiar rights that are accorded to members of Parliament to permit them to discharge their parliamentary duties have in some way been violated. These rights are extremely narrow and specific—for in-

stance, the right to speak freely in this place; or to attend here without obstruction. They relate to the member's functions in the chamber."

The absence of the necessary connection between the incidents in question and a member's parliamentary duties is as compelling in the case at hand as it was a year ago. For these reasons, the *prima facie* case of privilege has not been established with respect to the matter of budget secrecy.

However, I do not want members to be left with the impression that there is nothing to the concern raised by the member from Wellington-Halton Hills. In my 2008 ruling, I indicated that it "is undoubtedly at minimum a matter of courtesy and respect for this institution that all important announcements be made here first."

To this, let me add that I've heard many members on both sides of this House lament the erosion of public interest in and consciousness of the work of members and this chamber. It behooves the government to give careful reflection as to whether staged pre-budget media events outside the House contribute to that erosion. Ours is a representative system of democracy. When the members of this House are treated with indifference, so too are the citizens they represent.

As for the member's concern about his inability to access the chamber, and in particular the papers in his chamber desk, it is clear from the member's submission that he was seeking access to the chamber well after the House had adjourned for the day, not for the purpose of attending a sitting of the House. In other words, this is not a case where the member was obstructed or interfered with in the performance of his parliamentary duties, or where he was being prevented from physically accessing a sitting of the House.

Moreover, the chamber has often been the venue of government preparations in advance of budget day, regardless of which party has formed the government of the day. Of course, such non-legislative functions could only be scheduled for times when the House is not actually sitting. In the case at hand, the scheduling of the use of the chamber for non-legislative purposes on Tuesday evening, after the House was adjourned for the day, was consistent with similar courtesies that the Office of the Assembly has offered to past government officials preparing for the budget. For these reasons, I find that a *prima facie* case of privilege has not been established in the matter of access to the chamber.

1040

Let me add, however, that there is no reason why the member could not have requested the assembly's security staff to retrieve the papers from his desk in the circumstances he described. To this end, I have confirmed with the Sergeant-at-Arms that his staff can and will, upon request by a member, retrieve a member's papers from his or her chamber desk as expeditiously as circumstances permit, even when the chamber has been properly scheduled for an after-hours event. I believe the security officer in this circumstance acted according to that protocol.

I thank the member for Wellington-Halton Hills for raising and speaking to both matters, and the government House leader, the member for Timmins-James Bay and the member for Newmarket-Aurora for their helpful submissions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Speaker, through you to the Premier: Last Thursday's budget confirmed that Premier McGuinty is the undisputed champion of serial promise-breakers, with unemployment at 8.7%, hundreds of thousands of Ontarians out of work, and hard-working families just hanging on day to day. I'm only going to focus on one component of your tax grab in this question, one component that impacts virtually everyone—people on fixed incomes, seniors, the unemployed, small business—and that is your 8% tax hike on gasoline.

Premier, how can you in good conscience in the middle of a recession dramatically increase the cost of this basic need for all Ontarians, especially those struggling today to make ends meet?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question and I look forward to the opportunity to debate this budget bill today and during the coming weeks and, indeed, months.

We're proud of our budget. We have worked long and hard to speak with Ontarians to get their best sense of where we need to go on this. We're absolutely convinced that we cannot adopt the status quo. The world is changing around us and we have to make some substantial changes here in the province of Ontario.

The single greatest consensus connected with what we might do to make ourselves more competitive so that we can strengthen this economy and have the capacity to create those good jobs and support good-quality public services was to be found in moving toward a single sales tax. That's why we're moving in that direction and that's why, at the same time, we've put in place tax measures that also benefit our families and individuals, and I'd be pleased to speak to those in more detail in the subsequent questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Speaker, I'm sure you noticed that I asked the Premier about a specific component of his budget, which he declined to respond to.

For those of us over 50 who remember buying gasoline by the gallon, I'll translate your gasoline tax grab into gallons: 32 cents a gallon at current prices. That's a mammoth tax hike in anybody's books except, apparently, yours and that of your comrade in arms, Bob Rae. Premier, what if you're someone commuting from Barrie or Durham to Toronto for work? What if you're a small businessman with two or three trucks, or an independent taxi operator?

You, Premier, are living in a taxpayer-subsidized bubble. Do you have any idea of the hardship you're imposing on struggling Ontarians with this unconscionable tax grab?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to remind my colleague that 93% of Ontario taxpayers will be paying less as a result of this budget. We're going to have the lowest first tax bracket in all of Canada. Approximately 90,000 low-income taxpayers will no longer pay personal income tax. There is going to be a 30% average tax cut for families earning under \$25,000. A single parent earning \$25,000 and with one child is going to save over \$1,100 under our tax plan.

If you take a look at the comprehensive package, if you understand what our overriding objective is, which is to build both a more competitive and a more caring Ontario, I think Ontarians will come to the conclusion that we're being successful in both regards.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: This serial promise-breaking Premier continues to insult the intelligence of Ontarians. Last June, Premier, you said it would be crazy for any government to increase taxes in the middle of a recession. In the 2007 election campaign, you, for the second time, promised Ontarians you wouldn't increase taxes. For the second time, you violated a sacred trust, blindsided the people of Ontario, and, according to today's Toronto Star, you even blindsided your own caucus by bringing in another massive tax grab. Premier, on gasoline tax alone: a tax on a tax—a huge increase that will hit hardest those who can least afford it. Why would you do this in the middle of a recession?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: As you might imagine, I take issue on a number of scores here.

First of all, none of these tax measures take place for another 15 months. It may be that the leader of the official opposition believes that we're going to be mired in a global recession at that point in time, but I have a different take on that.

As well, we are cutting taxes for Ontarians by \$10.6 billion, \$2.3 billion of which is permanent. And we're cutting taxes for our businesses by \$4.5 billion. This is a dramatic response to an extraordinary set of circumstances.

We recognize that there are difficult choices that we made in this budget—there will be a significant deficit—but we have to bring an extraordinary and a dramatic response to the circumstances before us. That's why we're cutting taxes for families; that's why we're cutting taxes for businesses. We want to strengthen the economy to ensure we have the capacity to support good-quality public services long into the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I think we can take his forecast with not just a grain of salt, but a block of salt. When General Motors announced some layoffs not too long ago, this is the same fellow who said, "It's just a

little contraction." Wasn't that what he said? And now we're supposed to take his prognostications in terms of when we're going to recover in this province.

TAXATION

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Back to the Premier: The feelings expressed in newspapers across this province since Thursday show that no one is buying your weak defence of this massive tax grab. Just a few examples: "Poor being kicked while they are down," says the St. Catharines Standard; "The wrong time for a Liberal tax grab," says the Waterloo Record; "Taxman hits everything," says the London Free Press.

Premier, we have to wonder, are you hearing or even listening to the message from every corner of this province about your massive tax grab? Or do you intend to disregard the concerns of Ontarians and shove it down their throats no matter how loudly they protest?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's interesting to hear from my colleague. I assume that the Conservative Party is now taking a position that, after we proceed with the implementation of this single sales tax, after we flow transition funds to Ontario families, after we provide subsidies to our businesses to make the change, after they move from collecting two sales taxes to merely collecting the one, I understand that, I guess, as part of their platform, we're going to return to two sales taxes in the province of Ontario. Businesses need to be very clear on that front, that they're going to bring us back.

Just so we're clear, 130 countries have moved toward a single sales tax system. No jurisdiction has ever moved forward and then turned it back, but I understand we're going to be the exception here in Ontario. Notwithstanding the fact that we're going to move toward a single, modern, more efficient single sales tax, the Ontario Conservative Party is telling us they're going to roll that back and reimpose two sales taxes on Ontario businesses. You'd better confirm that now.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills isn't helping.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Perhaps the honourable member may want to ask a question later in question period.

Please continue.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Unlike the government side, we have respect for the intelligence of Ontario voters. We know that your platform will not be worth the paper it's written on, and you've proven that over two successive elections.

CI Financial of Canada says a harmonized sales tax will result in additional taxes being applied to investments, management services, mutual funds, segregated funds and other management investment accounts. Your proposed HST will take an additional \$500 million a year

from the savings of Ontario residents. You've already decimated seniors' life savings; your new tax on funeral services shows you're willing to go into any lengths to reach into their pockets, even when they're leaving this earth. Premier, what can you tell seniors, who built the foundation of this province, that once again you're doing everything you can to reach into their lifetime of hard-earned savings?

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's a little confusing, because just a few days ago the leader of the official opposition said, "I think, in theory, our party is supportive of harmonization." Then he went on to say, "In principle, it's something we think should occur."

Just so we're clear on this: Our tax measures, over the course of the next four years, will cost the Ontario treasury \$2.3 billion. We are running a deficit, and a significant deficit, as part of a comprehensive package to stimulate the economy and to make our economy more competitive for the future. So we're making dramatic tax cuts, not only for businesses but for families. Those are permanent tax cuts. They're the kinds of things that we know, and I'm convinced the leader of the official opposition knows, need to be done so that we can have the capacity to support our public services.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Just for the record, like the Premier's promises, the people of Ontario can disregard what the Premier said about my position, because it's quite inaccurate. You would think the Premier would have learned by now about what happens when he disregards the families in this province. Just look at the Lord's Prayer, the young driver's bill and the York University strike. Premier, how many e-mails, phone calls, petitions, Facebook pages, letters to the editor and Twitterers is it going to take for you to fully appreciate just how your tax grab is going to devastate the families of this province—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. The member from Eglinton–Lawrence will withdraw the comment that he just made.

Mr. Mike Colle: I withdraw the comment.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please continue.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: He heard the question.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There is a fundamental difference of opinion in terms of what we need to do to strengthen the economy. The official opposition does not believe that we should move towards a single sales tax regime. I think that is a terrible mistake on their part, and I interpret from that they choose that we stand pat. We choose to take a stand. We're going to find a way forward.

What's happening in Ontario and what's happening in the world is big; it is very big. The world is changing; we need to make some changes here to our economy. The single most important thing that we can do to improve our capacity to maintain good-quality public services, to

ensure that we can support good schools and good health care and supports for our most vulnerable Ontarians, is to move forward with this comprehensive tax package, to move towards a single sales tax, to cut our business taxes and to cut taxes on our families. We've delayed the implementation for some 15 months and we've taken steps to ensure that families enjoy, over the long term, permanent tax cuts.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Premier: On Thursday, Ontario women and men learned that they'll be paying 8% more: 8% more to fill up the gas tank to get to work, 8% more to heat their homes and pay their electricity bill, 8% more for their morning coffee and doughnut. When people are only worried about their jobs, why is this Premier adding 8% more to their bills?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, we're cutting taxes for our families; 93% of Ontarians are going to enjoy a permanent tax cut. The leader of the NDP, I gather, is in the same camp, not philosophically but, like the leader of the official opposition, they prefer that today we do nothing. That's not an option for us. We have to do something.

Let me give you another good piece of news that I got this morning. George Cope, who's the CEO of Bell and BCE, said this morning: "As has been the experience in other provinces in which Bell operates, savings from a single sales tax structure will accelerate our investment in Ontario. Fewer dollars going towards taxes in 2010 mean more dollars—\$1.5 billion—that Bell will reinvest in our networks." That's \$1.5 billion; that's a lot of new jobs in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario families were looking for a plan from this government to address the jobs crisis, but instead the Premier decided to cuddle up with Stephen Harper, striking a backroom deal with him. The impact on families is 8% more for the things that they buy every month, like gas and hydro.

Why did the Premier strike the backroom deal with Stephen Harper and hammer Ontario families with another 8% tax?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Well, again, I just don't see it the way my honourable colleague does. Our \$32.5-billion investment in infrastructure will create 300,000 jobs in the short term. I would love to have my honourable colleague tell us that in addition to supporting that, she commends our move to dramatically accelerate the Ontario child benefit from \$50 a month per child to \$92 per month per child. I would like to hear her support for the \$1.2-billion investment we are making in social and affordable housing. I would like to get her support for the \$260 new sales tax benefit for low-income families, children and adults alike. I would like to have her support on those particular aspects of the budget which speak to our desire to build not only a more competitive but a more caring Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Only six months ago, this government was handing out leaflets that said, "Fairness for Ontario." They were campaigning on fairness for Ontario. It's clear that the governments have now kissed and made up. Now you've kissed and made up, and you've ended that phony campaign. I think it's time the people in this province launched their own fairness campaign against the McGuinty and Harper governments for their unfair 8% tax hike.

When families in this province are worried about their jobs and their savings, why did the Premier strike a back-room deal with Stephen Harper to add an 8% tax on the price of everyday goods?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We've worked hard to create exemptions for those items that are near and dear to families in their daily living, to make sure they're exempt from the provincial portion of the new sales tax.

I recognize that what we're proposing represents significant change. It is dramatic change, but it is absolutely essential that we put in place a modern, efficient and competitive tax model. We already have the most highly educated workforce in the western world. What we want to do in addition to that, to make ourselves competitive when it comes to securing international investment, is to make sure we have in place a competitive tax regime.

Now, my colleague says that we should do nothing. She thinks that the world from before the recession hit is still with us. It's no longer with us. We need to do something that is dramatic, that is progressive, that's—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

MINIMUM WAGE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: It sounds like the higher sales tax is not the only thing that the Harper government and the McGuinty governments agree on. They also agree on lower minimum wages for workers. On Thursday, the budget reaffirmed the government's commitment to a \$10.25 minimum wage by March 31, 2010. Less than 24 hours later, the Premier said the 75-cent increase will depend on business conditions. Talk about a double whammy: Thursday an 8% sales tax on basic purchases, followed on Friday by a minimum-wage backtrack.

Why is the Premier backpedalling on a \$10.25 minimum wage?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this. The fact is, it does call for some clarification on my part, and I take responsibility for muddying the waters.

I think when we talk about the minimum wage, we have to ask ourselves what it is that we owe both our workers and employers. I think clearly we owe them fairness. Our commitment was to get to \$10.25 an hour one year from now, and we will honour that commitment. It is fair to workers, as we try to recover from nine years of frozen minimum wages.

I think as well it is fair to our employers, given that in this budget we're reducing the corporate income tax, we're reducing the small-business corporate tax rate, we're eliminating the small-business clawback and we're moving towards a single sales tax. In those circumstances, it remains fair to Ontario employers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, I've got to tell you, the last thing the people of Ontario needed, particularly the hard-working people of Ontario who are working for minimum wage, is a Premier who couldn't make up his mind as to whether or not they would get their raise.

While the Premier was flip-flopping around and musing about this raise, people were worried. People were very concerned. So now I need to ask the Premier, which Premier are they supposed to believe: the Premier who was musing a few days ago or the Premier who yet again made another promise today in this Legislature?

1100

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'd ask Ontarians to look at what's going to happen tomorrow when the sixth increase in minimum wage takes effect. We go up to \$9.50. I'd ask them to take a look at what we've done with respect to the Ontario child benefit through this budget, increased from \$50 to \$92 per month per child. I'd ask them to take a look at the \$1.2-billion investment we're making in social housing. I'd ask them to take a look at the \$260 sales tax credit that we're putting in place to provide protection to our adults and children alike in the face of the new single sales tax, and the permanent tax cut. We will now have the lowest tax bracket in Canada for Ontarians at low-income levels. I think if they take a look at the big package, they'll see that we are, in fact, building a more caring Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thursday's budget really showed the McGuinty government's real priorities. Instead of the jobs plan that we were looking for, the Premier is tacking 8% more tax on the prices of everyday things in this province. Instead of a jobs plan, the Premier decided to hand out \$2 billion in corporate tax giveaways to corporations that don't need it. Then the Premier decided to muse about whether the lowest-paid workers in this province deserve an increase in their minimum wage.

What I want to know from this Premier is this: Instead of making families worry about their ability to get a minimum wage, why didn't he put on his priority list making sure that they have decent jobs and making sure that his priority is for the hard-working women and men of this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Well, this budget is all about jobs. The \$32.5 billion that we invest—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: They laugh; they laugh, but \$32.5 billion is devoted to infrastructure. That's going to create jobs in the short term. In addition to that, it's going to give us more schools, more hospitals, better roads, better public transit and the like. The purpose of moving ahead with a single sales tax is so that we have a more

competitive economy so that our businesses can create more jobs. The entire budget is about jobs, and I'd love to have the support of the honourable colleague opposite when it comes to that particular dimension of our budget. It's more jobs for more Ontarians.

PROVINCIAL DEBT

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier. Premier, your budget contained a record-breaking deficit and a massive increase in provincial debt. Working families and seniors have made enormous sacrifices, many, sadly, choosing between filling the grocery cart or paying the bills. They gave you, Premier, through their sacrifices an increase of some \$26 billion, and you spent it all.

It took from Confederation to 2002 to get provincial debt to \$111 billion. Premier, you're going to almost double it to \$200 billion in five short years. Isn't this a shocking failure in your leadership?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: It's interesting to hear from the member opposite. His government added \$48 billion to the provincial debt—\$48 billion in good times, in very good times. There is no doubt that governments around the world, the government of the United States, the government of Canada—the government of Alberta has gone from a surplus of \$8 billion last June to a deficit of \$1.4 billion now. There's no doubt, and we take this issue very seriously. Unlike the member opposite, we are going to invest in new jobs, 300,000 over the next two years, and we're doing this in difficult times.

There are difficult choices to be made. The member opposite and his party just one day say one thing, the next day say another thing. This government's taking action to build jobs, to grow this economy, and sir, we will make sure—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I never thought we'd see the return of Floyd Laughren to the Ontario Legislature, but here he is before us today. I refer the minister to his own budget papers, pages 144 and 145, Minister, where it shows that Dalton McGuinty took the provincial debt from just over \$100 billion to \$200 billion, despite record revenues coming into the treasury. You took every penny and you spent it and then some.

I say to the minister, how can you tell the children and grandchildren today how they are going to benefit when you've doubled the debt, through your irresponsible decisions, that they are going to have to pay through higher taxes down the road?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: What they are going to get is good health care, good schools, a cleaner environment and more jobs going forward. What they won't get is a \$5.5-billion hidden deficit. What they won't get is a party that, in its pre-budget submission, says, "Tax reform like the federal government's recommending." They say that in their pre-budget submission, and then the day after the budget they say they are against it.

The leader of the third party—the interim leader of the second party says, "In principle, we support this." Well, in fact, here it is: It is a tax cut for 93% of Ontarians. The day before the budget, the second party said, "Cut corporate taxes; cut personal taxes." We've done that. Now they say they're going to vote—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is for the Premier. The North American auto industry is in a crisis. Reports are circulating that Washington has denied GM and Chrysler further funds and that the bankruptcy of the two companies can't be ruled out. High-level meetings are beginning in Washington and Detroit, but there is silence from the government of the jurisdiction that produces the largest number of vehicles in North America. Four hundred thousand good-paying jobs and the future of Ontario's economy are at stake. Where is the government's plan?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to speak to the issue. I believe that President Obama will shortly be making an announcement in Washington. We have been working to work in concert with Washington, and I anticipate that, shortly thereafter, Ministers Bryant and Clement will be making an announcement in Ottawa so that we can move in lockstep with Washington to ensure that at all times we're acting to protect our proportionate share of the industry here in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Paul Miller: New Democrats have outlined what is needed in Ontario: a made-for-Ontario auto strategy. We need public and worker representatives on the board of directors; we need an equity stake in companies that you own, that budgets say will be receiving billions of dollars in aid over the oncoming years; and most of all, we need iron-clad and product guarantees that will guarantee that billions in tax dollars create good-paying jobs that remain right here in Ontario.

I repeat: What is the government's plan?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to remind my honourable colleague, and I don't doubt the sincerity of his interest in this, that prior to Christmas, the Prime Minister and I indicated that we would put together a \$4-billion package worth of funding to provide transitional support for the sector here in Canada. The industry has not had call upon those resources to this point in time. I believe that the announcement to be made later today will begin to speak to the industry need for that.

We are going to continue to find ways to work with both Washington and the sector here in Ontario to do everything we can to preserve it. People have traditionally talked about the Big Three. I've reminded them that it's not about the Big Three; it's about the big 400,000 workers and their families who are connected with this industry. It is very important to us and we are committed

to finding a way to stabilize it and to strengthen it here in Ontario.

POVERTY

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Minister, I've heard from families in my riding who are having a hard time making ends meet. They need more support to help provide for their children. Community organizations have repeated this call. For example, Neighbour to Neighbour, an organization on Hamilton Mountain that supports Hamiltonians in times of need, requires a strong government partner to help families through this recession. The proposed increase to the Ontario child benefit ahead of the scheduled timeline is an important step towards continuing this partnership by supporting Ontario families.

Can the minister please share more details about this announcement and how it will help families in my riding, especially those who are experiencing the economic downturn?

1110

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'd like to thank the member for the great work she is doing.

The Ontario child benefit is the foundation of our poverty reduction strategy. Families received a down payment in July 2007 and began receiving their monthly cheques this past July.

We know the OCB is making a difference, but we also know that many families are facing challenging economic times and need more support. That's why our budget proposes to speed up the implementation of the Ontario child benefit by two years. Starting this July, it will be almost doubled, from maximum payments of \$600 per child to \$1,100 per child annually. That's an increase of \$500 per year for each child, helping parents to provide nutritious food or more stable housing or give their children the opportunity to participate in music lessons or play sports.

The increase to the OCB is just one of the ways—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I appreciate the minister's response.

There has been a lot of talk recently about whether or not we can implement our poverty reduction strategy in the face of economic decline. The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, a multi-sector community organization dedicated to reducing poverty in Hamilton, has been a strong advocate for the reduction of child poverty by 25% in five years. It's essential that we take the steps outlined in the poverty reduction strategy to ensure Ontarians have our full support during these tough times.

Can the minister please tell this House what the proposed speeding-up of the Ontario child benefit means for the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy and whether the government is still committed to implementing the full strategy?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We're not just proceeding with the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy; we're accelerating it. The OCB is a huge part of our poverty reduction strategy, and our budget shows just how committed we are to implementing the strategy, especially in the face of tough economic times.

The proposed increase comes two full years ahead of schedule and will be followed up with another increase, to \$1,310 per child annually at full implementation. We've also taken action on other areas in the budget that were included in the strategy: \$3 million for community hubs; \$4.5 million for employment standards officers; \$35 million for the youth opportunities strategy; and over \$1.2 billion in partnership with the federal government for affordable housing.

With our 2009 budget we're showing just how committed we are to implementing the poverty reduction strategy to improve outcomes for all Ontarians and help them get through these tough times.

TAXATION

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. The centrepiece of the McGuinty budget is a \$2.3-billion tax grab that will hit every family in this province and every business. In these tough economic times, the last thing that families need is a tax increase and the last thing businesses need is an increase in the cost of doing business. His HST proposal misses the very point: Its intention is to simplify the tax system. What he's ended up with by trying to accommodate every lobby group is to put in place exemptions that will in fact give us a more complicated tax system.

Will the Premier agree that he made the wrong decision and will he agree to step down from this wrong-headed proposal and reverse himself in the same way that he did on the minimum wage?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Just so we can marvel at the twisting that's taking place there, the leader of the official opposition stood up and said, "We need to exempt gasoline." This member is now saying, "No; there's a problem with our single sales tax proposal because it's not pure enough and there are exemptions associated with it."

We have chosen some specific exemptions which we think are nearest and dearest and closest to the hearts of Ontario families. It's hard to figure out, not only from one day to the next but from one question to the next, where the Conservative Party stands with respect to sales tax reform in the province of Ontario. Are they in favour of exemptions that help families or not?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: The Premier makes my point. My point is that he has brought a system of taxation into this province that does not work. The fact that he now is wrestling to put in place exemptions here and exemptions there and paying off people with \$1,000 cheques—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment, please.

Mr. Frank Klees: —and pay people \$1,000 to be quiet about this, thinking that they may not feel the effect until the next election, is fundamentally wrong. It's the wrong time and the wrong place for a tax hike on businesses and families in this province.

What I'm saying, the pure unadulterated response and answer, is back down on the implementation of the HST, get off the backs of business, get off the backs of families in this province.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're moving forward. The times call for us to demonstrate leadership. The times call for us to find a way forward. The world around us is changing, and what's happening out there is big. It is really big. It is a worldwide recession. It's having a profound impact not only in Ontario and Canada but indeed the world as a whole. We need to make some changes internal to our province. We're doing that through our new single sales tax regime.

I don't understand where my colleague is coming from. The fact is, it is supported by the chamber of commerce in Ontario, it is supported by the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, it is supported by organizations like the C.D. Howe Institute and it is supported by dozens and dozens of economists and business organizations. They're telling us that this is the single most important thing we can do to help them create more jobs, to create more wealth, to support our schools and our hospitals.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. In 2007, Premier McGuinty was quoted in the *Toronto Star* saying, "Ontario needs minimum standards of care in nursing homes that give seniors the 'dignity and respect' they deserve." Yet the same year, the government passed Bill 140, the Long-Term Care Homes Act, that failed to set minimum standards of care. Everyone concerned about the absence of standards was told that their concerns would be addressed in the Sharkey report. Yet today, almost a year after Sharkey's report was released, we have not seen a single step towards establishing standards of care.

Can the Minister of Health explain to Ontario's seniors why his government has failed to put in place minimum standards of care in long-term-care homes?

Hon. David Caplan: I appreciate the question from the member opposite, because in fact this government is increasing capacity and making sure that our long-term-care residents get an appropriate level of care.

I am, and I know members on this side of the House are, committed to improving the quality of care for residents through the development of staffing plans, the involvement and collaboration of residents' families, staff and people who operate long-term-care homes. For the very first time in Ontario's history, we're bringing all of the partners to the table to enhance that care and improve the satisfaction. That is the essence of the recommen-

dations that Shirlee Sharkey, as the member referenced in her question, came forward with. Ms. Sharkey in her report found that there was no evidence to support a three-and-a-half-hour minimum standard of care as some of the employee groups have called for.

I know that Ms. Sharkey is working with an implementation group, which includes representatives right across the spectrum, to ensure the successful implementation of her—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: There are a few problems with the implementation group working on the Sharkey report. Today, four major health care unions that participated in Sharkey's report working group are withdrawing. They are frustrated that the process has gone nowhere.

Minister, Ontarians are wondering why the minister has chosen the route of endless study and meetings, when he could have implemented minimum standards of care two years ago and stood up for the well-being of Ontario's most vulnerable people. How does the minister justify dragging his heels when seniors are suffering?

Hon. David Caplan: I disagree completely with the member opposite. In fact, there have been significant quality improvements in long-term-care homes already. We're beginning to measure and report publicly health outcomes and satisfaction for the very first time through the Ontario Health Quality Council. We're working with our partners to implement the recommendations that Ms. Sharkey quite sagely made. We've introduced a new act, the Long-Term Care Homes Act, to deliver better care. In fact, the first wave of regulations is currently posted on the website to have public feedback and consultation. We've increased staff capacity in our homes. We have committed to adding 2,500 additional personal support workers and 2,000 more nurses. We've already raised the level of paid daily care to three and a quarter hours toward a standard the member asked for. In fact, we're re-building 35,000 beds over the next 10 years. That's more than half the homes in this province. Over—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

1120

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. Minister, I believe that Ontario is a world leader when it comes to research. For example, just this month, we heard of the incredible breakthroughs that came as a result of the work of Dr. Andras Nagy and his discovery, turning human skin cells into stem cells.

I'm hearing from Guelph entrepreneurs and innovation leaders, such as John Kelly at MaRS Landing, that we can't stop investing now. Kelly recently stated in the *Guelph Mercury*: "It's our future. We can't rely on Industries that have served us so much in the past. We have to look forward. We have to make sure that people don't retrench, hold on to their cards and not invest in

innovation. It's a mistake to think that you can't invest in the future, even in these economically troubled times."

Minister, new venture capital is scarce right now due to global economic conditions. What is Ontario doing to ensure that there is sufficient capital—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my good friend from Guelph for the question.

I agree with the advice that we received from our good friends in Guelph. This is no time to take our eye off the ball when it comes to innovation. That is why, in our recent budget, there was a commitment of over \$700 million of additional resources, as we drive our economy based on the creation of new ideas in Ontario that will create new Ontario jobs. And we need those jobs today more than ever.

I had the opportunity about 10 days ago to visit a firm called ecobee, joined by other small businesses. There is a lack of venture capital available, and we've taken a bold step, creating the new \$250-million emerging technologies fund. That will be matched by the private sector. That creates a new pool of capital, some \$500 million, to ensure that if you have a great idea in Ontario—that we are open for business, that we're willing to partner with you. If you're willing to take a risk, so are we—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: There's no doubt that there is a need for an injection of capital out in the marketplace. Minister, companies are saying this investment alone is not enough, however. Earlier this month, the National Post ran an article by Karen Mazurkewich entitled "High-Tech Ventures Feel Crunch: Stimulus Needed; Ontario's \$250M Fund Not Enough, Industry Warns." In the article she says, "Emerging high-tech firms are struggling ... stalled and starved for cash," and that "this group hasn't got much love from the province or venture capitalists of late."

To get investments flowing again, the government needs to wake the Ontario venture capital market and get these firms investing in new projects. Has the government been ignoring this sector? Does the government have a strategy to grow new, innovative companies and the venture capital market in Ontario? Minister, we need your help here.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Well, I want to say to all the readers of the National Post, \$855 million in the province of Ontario that is available today, compared to just 18 months ago. Not only is there the new \$250-million emerging technologies fund, which will be matched by the private sector at least dollar for dollar, creating half a billion dollars; there is as well the Ontario venture capital fund, some \$205 million, which has already started making investments in Ontario venture capital. We're particularly proud of Research in Motion and their creation of a new \$150-million BlackBerry Partners Fund. So, in the last 18 months alone in the province of Ontario, I can proudly say that there is at least another \$855

million worth of venture capital. It's exactly what our economy needs today to accelerate the growth.

We need to help create those new jobs that are coming out of the great ideas, the world-class, breakthrough ideas that are coming every—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question today is for the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services. Minister, the Mount St. Louis Moonstone ski resort employs between 350 and 400 people, and it has been a model for a family tourism enterprise since its founding 45 years ago. They've invested tens of millions of dollars and a lifetime of hard work creating a business that all Ontarians, I believe, should be proud of. They cater to families across Ontario and beyond.

Minister, the budget last week and the proposed harmonized tax will now add another \$4 to the price of each lift ticket. The owner of Mount St. Louis fears that this newest tax hike will drive families away in these very difficult economic times. Minister, can you inform the House today what you will do to ensure that there will be no loss of jobs or impact on businesses such as Mount St. Louis Moonstone as a result of your newest tax grab?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Let me say this: I am very proud of the budget that we presented last Thursday. It strikes a perfect balance between assisting business people so that we can create the right environment and assisting families at the same time.

But the whole purpose of the budget is actually to create jobs. Especially for small businesses, the income taxes are going down by 18%. We are cutting the surtax on small businesses as well. In addition to that, the general income tax for other businesses is being decreased. We are also decreasing the business taxes on the manufacturing sector. This budget is very good for small businesses because it will help them to become more competitive in the marketplace and generate more jobs and keep—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you, Minister, and I'll make sure I take that answer back to the owners of Mount St. Louis Moonstone. Mr. Josl Huter is the owner of Mount St. Louis Moonstone ski resort and he says, "This is not the right time to add taxes. At this time, we're all scrambling. More and more people are unemployed. The dollar doesn't go as far. And now everything becomes more expensive."

Mr. Huter was building a successful business before a lot of people in this room were even born and has definitely paid his fair share of taxes. He also doesn't think the one-time \$1,000 rebate will ease the pain. He says, "A thousand dollars doesn't go that far. They're just talking to get it through."

Minister, again, how can you guarantee this particular company, and other companies like it, that this new Liberal tax grab will not impact tourism operators like Mount St. Louis Moonstone and add to the hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who have already lost their jobs under your Liberal regime?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: What this budget really does is cut the taxes for small businesses. It makes them more competitive in the marketplace so that they can compete effectively. It cuts their income taxes, it cuts their surtax, it cuts their minimum tax, and it also gives them the transition funding so that they can deal with the single-tax issues. It has done everything that is possible to make sure that businesses, especially small businesses, become more competitive in the marketplace so they can generate jobs. The whole emphasis is to make businesses more competitive but at the same time generate more jobs. That is what this budget has done.

GO TRANSIT

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. The lives of thousands of residents and business owners are being made unbearable by the earth-shaking clanging from new railbed construction in western Toronto, yet GO Transit refuses to implement ways to reduce the noise. When will the minister finally do something to get GO officials to address this unnecessary and unacceptable disruption of people's lives?

Hon. James J. Bradley: First of all, I want to say that both the provincial and federal members of Parliament for the area have drawn this to the attention of GO Transit on an ongoing basis. Certainly, for those who reside in the area, it is a very significant imposition. The member would know that from talking to her constituents.

GO Transit has been in constant consultation with the people in the area. They have been trying to explore other ways, I'm told, to undertake the work that they're undertaking at the present time. There are, I'm told, some technical problems with that because of the soil and the water table that is there. I know to the people who live there that doesn't make much of a difference, but I do know that GO is continuing to try to find ways to alleviate the grave concerns the people have and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Certainly that will be news to the residents because all they've heard is stonewalling from GO. There are ways to mitigate the noise made by driving so-called piles into the ground for railways, such as putting in place sheathing or augering the holes instead of pounding them. GO knows how to correct this problem, Mr. Minister; they're just not doing it. Will the minister demand that GO officials find a way to reduce the unacceptable noise levels?

1130

Hon. James J. Bradley: I've heard both from the member and from the federal member, Gerard Kennedy, that this is a major problem, and I think the people in the

area would agree. One of the challenges we have when we're trying to put public transit into place—or any transit into place—is that it's very difficult to do so without it being an imposition. I know they are making an effort to do so. I understand there is a high water table in this particular area and if drilling technology is used, the holes will collapse. When a piledriver is used, the steel sleeve being pounded into the ground remains in place, meaning no water can enter and collapse the hole created.

These are the facts, but having said that, I have already raised the concerns of the community with GO Transit, as I know the members have in the area, and I've asked them to look into other methods that might be available to them because I know the noise in that area is very loud for the people and a very great difficulty for the folks who reside in that area.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question is for the Minister of Health. Earlier this month Dr. Carol Herbert, the dean of the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry at the University of Western Ontario, did an interview with the London Free Press. She said that the shortage of doctors we are facing today came as a result of decisions made in the 1990s. Back then, the government in power was facing tough economic times, so they thought in order to save some money they would reduce spaces at medical schools across the province of Ontario.

Minister, can you tell us what you are doing in order to make sure that people in Ontario are still able to study at medical schools, in order to save our medical system and provide enough doctors—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member for this very important question. I want to assure the House and every Ontarian who is looking for a family doctor that our government is not going to cut medical school space like the member for Welland did. I want to say that, in fact, we're doing just the opposite; we're creating more. In our 2009 budget, which the finance minister here spoke about on Thursday, we're committed to providing \$35 million to create an additional 100 medical school spaces. Since 2004, we've increased the number of first-year medical school spaces by some 160. When our investments are combined, our government will have increased access to first-year medical education by 38% since 2004.

Yes, these are tough economic times. But we know something that other governments in this province failed to recognize: No matter the economic climate, Ontarians need better access to doctors and family health care providers. They need quality care, and that's what they're going to receive under this government.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you, Minister, for your commitment to medical and health care in the province of Ontario.

Minister, I know your government and your ministry have taken a lot of good initiatives and steps in order to

reform medical health care in the province of Ontario. I know, for example, you created Health Care Connect, a new phone line to help link Ontarians to health care, but my constituents in London–Fanshawe and many people across Ontario are still concerned about how to find a doctor to connect with in order to get service and get treated. Can you assure this House and my constituents in London–Fanshawe that you are going to make sure everyone in Ontario is able to visit or connect with a family doctor?

Hon. David Caplan: Again, I want to thank the member for London–Fanshawe for the question and for being such an incredibly strong advocate for high-quality health care.

I'm so pleased to inform the House that 2008 was a record-setting year. The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario issued nearly 3,500 certificates of registration in 2008. This is the highest number ever issued in a single year and a 6% increase over 2007. In addition, a recent study highlighted in the *Toronto Star* found that 22% of doctors graduating from McGill University choose to come here to Ontario; 27% of medical school grads from Memorial University and Dalhousie University did the same thing. In response to those numbers, the president of the Canadian Medical Association said, "Ontario is attractive; that's the conclusion we can make from those kinds of figures."

I'm proud of the steps that our government has taken to increase the number of doctors practising in Ontario and I'm going to keep working to ensure that we can—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Attorney General. The Ontario Bar Association has expressed serious concerns about the implications of tax harmonization for the cost of legal services for hard-working Ontarians. Mr. Jamie Trimble, president of the association, has written a letter to the Premier indicating that, "If, for instance, harmonization of the two taxes means that legal fees, formerly not subject to PST, become subject to PST, the overall cost of legal services will increase and create a further barrier in access to justice." Attorney General, why is your government making it even harder for Ontarians to have access to our justice system?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: There are some very significant access-to-justice issues right now. It would be tempting to lay them at the feet of the GST, but they have accumulated over many years. We have a justice system that's too slow, has too many steps—many of which are adjournments—and is far too costly for too many Ontarians. That's why we brought in initiatives in the criminal, civil and family areas to speed it up, to get to the decision point faster, eliminate the unnecessary steps and make sure people have access to a justice system that works. For those who are vulnerable, who have no money, we are working to strengthen the legal aid system

and to make sure that all Ontarians, through our Justice Ontario initiative, have access to information about the system so they know what it looks like before they have to enter it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Mr. Trimble's letter makes a very compelling case for reconsideration of this ill-advised tax grab. He expresses concern that in "these economically troubled times Ontario will unfortunately see an increase in domestic violence, family and marriage breakdown and criminal activity, which puts increasing pressure on the justice system, the legal aid system and those people seeking representation from private practitioners." Attorney General, why is your government putting even greater stress on an already strained legal system and putting more vulnerable Ontarians at risk?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We're in fact taking the opposite step. Access to justice for those who don't have a huge amount of money is enhanced by speeding up the system, taking out the unnecessary steps and removing the unnecessary paperwork. That decreases the overall cost of legal services. For those who need the legal aid plan, we have brought in three separate 5% increases to the tariff—the last increase of \$51 million just a few years ago.

It's very interesting to hear the member stand when she represents a party that campaigned on a 20% cut to legal aid, and they delivered. They almost bankrupted the legal aid system in 1996. The member can say no, but those of us who do legal aid work or did legal aid work know that they almost bankrupted the system. Their government had to be sued to pay the lawyers who delivered the services.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. After promising in this very Legislature, in the presence of Julie and John Craven, the grieving mother and grandfather of Jared Osidacz, that all the questions surrounding the 8-year-old boy's murder would be answered at the coroner's inquest, is this minister at all concerned about the report of the coroner's counsel screaming and yelling at Julie on the witness stand and, in her words, treating her like she was a criminal, when all she wants is for the truth to come out about the link between the domestic violence that she suffered from her then-husband and his eventual murder of their son?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Obviously, there is an inquest going on so we're not going to speak to the specifics. I can tell you, there isn't a person in this place or in Ontario that doesn't want that mother and that grandfather to get the answers that they're looking for.

I'm proud and happy, and I think we should all be very happy, that that inquest is now under way. The coroner has determined the direction of the inquest, and I look forward to the recommendations from that inquest.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It was supposed to be an inquest into the death of a child and not the farcical and shameful show of disrespect that it has become. A key report on the link between domestic violence and this murder was prepared on behalf of the coroner by Dr. Peter Jaffe, but it was hidden from the inquest jury. The inquest is so narrow in scope—you're so proud of it—that many of the Cravens' questions are not being answered. None of their witnesses are going to be called. I hope you're proud of that. The minister said he would support the Craven family by getting all their questions answered, but the opposite is happening.

1140

Will this minister use his powers, now, to launch a public inquiry, a stand-alone inquiry into Jared's murder and honour the promise he made to the family here in this very chamber?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: No, we're not going to order a public inquiry. We're going to allow the process to take place. We hope that the recommendations from that inquest will ensure that this type of circumstance never happens again. The coroner is in the best position to decide the parameters around that. That has taken place. The inquest is going on and I am confident—very confident, in fact—that at the end of this, the recommendations that will be made will ensure that these types of circumstances never happen again.

ABORIGINAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. Minister, we hear a lot these days about the importance to First Nations communities of economic development. I know that this government is committed to improving the quality of life in aboriginal communities and in helping to close the socio-economic gap between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people in Ontario. We all recognize that it is unacceptable for aboriginal people to have higher unemployment levels, earn less money and generally face greater economic challenges than do non-aboriginal people.

Minister, can you tell us about some of the things the Ontario government is doing to encourage economic development opportunities for aboriginal people?

Hon. Brad Duguid: This government and the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs are working with First Nation and Metis communities, in concert with other ministries throughout our government, to promote economic development and sustainability for aboriginal people in Ontario. Our recently released budget is a clear demonstration of this government's commitment to provide economic opportunities for aboriginal people. For example, we have the \$250-million loan guarantee program which will support aboriginal participation in renewable energy projects. This is something long called for by very much-respected First Nation leaders such as National Chief Phil Fontaine and Ontario Regional Chief Angus Toulouse.

This commitment, along with the elements of the Green Energy Act, will create partnership opportunities

for First Nation communities and businesses and ensure that aboriginal people will play an important role in the recovery of our economy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1143 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Mike Colle: I just noticed that North America's finest mayor is here: Mayor McCallion of Mississauga. Welcome, Mayor.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TAXATION

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Dalton McGuinty has done it again. Premier McGuinty and the Liberal government have found a way to do the unthinkable, the unimaginable and the inconceivable.

Through the McGuinty tax grab in the 2009 budget, Premier Dalton McGuinty has found a way to tax the dead. That's right: Funerals will now be subjected to a harmonized tax. Starting on July 1, 2010, when you arrange a funeral for your loved one, you will be subjected to an additional 8% tax. A funeral service and burial here in Ontario can cost anywhere from \$10,000 and up, and now the Liberal government is asking the deceased and their grieving families to dig a little deeper when planning a final goodbye.

This is one of the many new things that Premier McGuinty has found to tax. Lawyers' fees to administer a last will and testament will be subjected to the McGuinty tax. Families using accountants to settle the estate will also be subjected to the new McGuinty tax. This new tax will also be charged on floral arrangements, catering and other funeral-related costs.

This McGuinty tax will affect seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians. Everyone in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario will pay more—and now the dead. How far will this Premier and his government go to tax the most vulnerable people in Ontario? To the end.

HOCKEY

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to salute Dave Gatherum, a mainstay of the 1950s Fort William Hurricanes who played three memorable games for the 1953-54 Detroit Red Wings Stanley Cup champions. His son-in-law, John Rich, an old friend of mine, spoke about his remarkable story in a recent letter to the editor.

Dave Gatherum, who lives in Thunder Bay, received his Stanley Cup ring in February 2009—55 years later—thanks to gracious Red Wings owner Mike Ilitch.

Dave played his three games in October 1953, after an injury to the legendary Terry Sawchuk. In Dave's first NHL appearance in October 1953 he shut out the Maple

Leafs. His streak of 100 minutes, 21 seconds without allowing a goal is the longest shutout sequence of a goaltender from the start of their NHL career. Dave's stats for his career were two wins, one tie and a goals-against average of one.

The 1953-54 Red Wings championship team included Fort William products such as Hall of Famer Alex Delvecchio and "Jolly" Jack Adams, who in his coaching and managing career captured six Stanley Cups. Another Fort William native on that team was Benny Woit, who played five seasons for the Wings, capturing three titles, and was one of hockey's best body checkers ever.

I salute that great and classy hockey family of the Detroit Red Wings, the home of Hockeytown USA, as well as the home of Hockeytown Canada, formerly Fort William and Port Arthur and now Thunder Bay, which has produced many stars, including Trevor Johansen; Eric, Marc and Jordan Staal; Patrick Sharp; Alex Auld; Trevor Letowski; Taylor Pyatt; Katie Weatherston; Olympic gold medallist Hayley Irwin of the 2010 women's Olympic team; and also from northwestern Ontario, Ryan Parent and Mike Richards, with many more to come.

TAXATION

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise today to tell members of the McGuinty government about the reaction I'm getting to their budget. My offices have been flooded with calls and e-mails from constituents who are absolutely frightened by this government's budget. The proposal to blend the federal and provincial sales taxes is sending shockwaves through the communities of Parry Sound-Muskoka.

For instance, Mr. Brown, who lives in Katrine, told me he can't afford to drive to Queen's Park to protest your government. He also told me that your harmonized sales tax means he won't be able to afford to stay in his home because he won't be able to afford the increased cost of home heating oil. By the way, he's not falling for your rebate, which he says would be a fraction of the actual costs he will face.

Another constituent writes: "In the news, they spoke of this magnanimous rebate of \$1,000. Yippee! It was also disclosed that on the average, this tax will cost the ratepayer an additional \$500 a year ... and I am sure that is based primarily on the people that live in the metropolitan areas. What will it cost us northerners, where to get a simple loaf of bread at the grocery store can easily cost \$10 in gas alone?"

The additional tax on fuel oil and gasoline alone will have a huge impact on the people of Parry Sound-Muskoka and those people in living in northern and rural areas. I ask the McGuinty government: How can you possibly justify this additional tax on gasoline and home heating oil?

PROTECTION OF WORKERS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I rise in the House today to call the McGuinty Liberals to account for the ongoing abuse

of foreign-trained nannies who work in Ontario. Nannies have been put in harm's way, denied OHIP, had their immigration status threatened and charged outrageous fees, all by unscrupulous agencies. The McGuinty government does not have to wait for the arduous passage or, most likely, non-passage of Mike Colle's bill, but through Bill 139, it could make the changes needed immediately. All the social service agencies that have deputed before the committee for Bill 139 have asked that "temporary" agencies be replaced with "employment" agencies. That simple change could curb most of the abuses.

The only question remaining is, with public pressure demanding action, why will McGuinty not act? We in the New Democratic Party want that action now, not in a private member's bill, but either through Bill 139 or by direct government intervention now.

VILLAGE OF WESTBORO

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: The year 2009 marks the 30th anniversary of the Westboro Village Business Improvement Area, which has a mandate to improve, beautify and maintain the public lands and buildings within the community of Westboro, a vibrant community in my riding of Ottawa Centre. Its boundaries encompass Richmond Road from Island Park to Golden Avenue, including Danforth and Picton avenues. The BIA promotes the area as a shopping and business district.

Westboro village was initially founded in 1817 and settled intensely since 1852. It was a major centre of lumber production and at one time home to one of the largest steam sawmills in Canada. Westboro was formally amalgamated into the city of Ottawa in 1950 and is today a community that offers some of the best shopping the city has to offer. I'm very pleased to have my community office located within Westboro at the corner of Roosevelt and Richmond.

Westboro BIA encompasses over 100 businesses, the best in shopping, dining, arts and entertainment. The BIA undertakes many activities to promote local businesses and funds many charitable causes. Westfest, now in its sixth year, is one of the largest free music and cultural festivals in Ottawa. Located in Westboro, this is another great initiative of the BIA.

I want to congratulate the Westboro Village Business Improvement Area and its executive director, Elaina Martin, on 30 superb years and wish them many more.

TAXATION

Mrs. Julia Munro: People in my riding want to know why this government is imposing new sales taxes on the real estate industry in the middle of a recession.

The Ontario Real Estate Association has estimated that the McGuinty sales tax increase will add about \$2,000 to the cost of a resale house priced at \$360,000. As well, new homes over \$400,000 will also be taxed. Home buyers and sellers will have to pay for more legal fees, moving costs, real estate commissions and home

inspection fees. Many home buyers will be priced out of the market. Especially hard hit will be first-time home buyers and lower-income home buyers.

Why does this government think that a higher tax on real estate is a good idea at any time, and certainly not in an economic downturn? Increasing the cost of housing will hurt everyone: homeowners, real estate agents, builders and all those businesses and workers that supply the housing industry.

The government must withdraw this foolish tax before it starts to kill jobs in real estate and construction, before it kills the dreams of thousands to own a home.

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RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Dave Levac: On Tuesday, March 24, I had the privilege of greeting the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, the Honourable George Smitherman, in the riding of Brant. It was one of the many stops in the province as part of this hard-working minister's Green Energy and Green Economy Act tour. We discussed and discovered how the Green Energy Act would help create more than 50,000 private sector jobs in the next three years, promote conservation, promote investments and provide lots of opportunity for growth in green technology throughout Ontario.

During his visit, I had the opportunity to host the minister and to bring him to two of the many companies in my riding that have had much to offer in terms of green energy technology: R.J. Ecosafe Homes in Ohsweken, of the Six Nations territory; and the ProTerra LED factory in St. George. We had the opportunity to meet the president of R.J. Ecosafe Homes, which is a First Nations-owned operation with non-native partners, a company that manufactures affordable, safe and durable insulated-panel homes which are erected directly on-site. Being composed of a revolutionary insulated metal panel system and powered and heated in part by the rays of the sun, they are energy-efficient and are compatible with their beliefs of living in union with Mother Earth.

The minister was also enthusiastic to see the company ProTerra, which manufactures a 50-watt LED street lamp replacement bulb that is comparable to the currently used 250-watt mercury vapour bulbs. The president of ProTerra, John Johnston, stated he currently has 11 employees and that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

TAXATION

Mr. Rick Johnson: We read every day about the impact of the global financial crisis. We, on this side of the House, have risen to the occasion and responded with a bold tax reform package. The McGuinty Liberals' plan to build Ontario's future economy and improve the quality of life for all Ontarians includes tax relief for all

segments of society. This bold package will help build a stronger economy by cutting taxes for nine tenths of Ontarians, while providing additional targeted tax cuts to those who need it most by:

—offering \$4 billion in tax relief cash payments, with every family making under \$160,000 receiving \$1,000 and individuals receiving \$300 to help the transition to the new sales tax system;

—providing more than \$1.1 billion annually in broadly based personal income tax relief that would see 93% of Ontario taxpayers pay less personal income tax; and

—establishing the Ontario sales tax credit, which would provide timely annual tax relief of up to \$260 for each adult and child in low- and middle-income families, benefiting more than 2.9 million Ontario families.

These tax relief initiatives underscore our government's commitment to Ontario families and together will continue to work hard to help them through this uncertainty and building a strong economy and strong communities for all Ontarians.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mr. David Zimmer: I want to recognize the McGuinty government's commitment to improving the lives of all Ontarians, especially the most vulnerable citizens. The McGuinty Liberals recognize that giving each child the resources and stability they need to reach their full potential is the right thing to do for our society and for our economy.

We've recognized this need and responded by: (1) almost doubling the Ontario child benefit credit, up to \$1,100 a month for low- and middle-income families, beginning in July 2009—that's two years ahead of schedule; (2) investing \$35 million over two years in our youth opportunities strategy, which helps young people in high-risk neighbourhoods through the creation of key opportunities, including targeted funding for summer jobs; (3) partnering with the federal government to invest \$1.2 billion in Ontario's social housing infrastructure. This investment in new, affordable housing units and the repair of others will provide children with the stability they need to reach their full potential.

The McGuinty Liberals know that Ontario is at its best when we are working together. We are proud of these investments, and we will continue to work hard to help each child build the skills necessary to succeed in this province.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I beg leave to present a report on hazardous waste management from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Sterling presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: The committee reviewed the section of the Auditor General's report of November 2007 and May 2008. This report reflects the committee's recommendations with regard to that section of the auditor's report.

The recommendations hone in on the Auditor General's recognition that the waste management manifests and tracking of hazardous waste are not in order. The committee asks for reports from the ministry on promised improvements to the hazardous waste management system for our province.

It was felt by members of the committee that there is a lot of work to be done in this area. The committee will continue to hold the ministry's feet to the fire to ensure that the auditor's recommendations of his report are held up. With that, I will adjourn the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Sterling moves the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

GREATER TORONTO AND HAMILTON AREA TRANSIT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU RÉSEAU DE TRANSPORT EN COMMUN DE LA RÉGION DU GRAND TORONTO ET DE HAMILTON

Mr. Bradley moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 163, An Act to amend the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority Act, 2006 / Projet de loi 163, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la Régie des transports du grand Toronto.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The minister for a short statement?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'll make my statement during the time allocated for ministerial statements.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Hon. James J. Bradley: I rise in the House to propose the next step to better serve the daily transportation needs

of the 5.5 million people in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area with greatly expanded public transit. I'm introducing the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area Transit Implementation Act, 2009, to merge Metrolinx and GO Transit and to put in place the tools for moving quickly as we take the regional transportation plan off the drawing board and into service.

Regional transit is finally catching up with regional needs. Our government is acting decisively and with a sense of urgency to build regional transit projects faster and more cost-effectively. These projects would mean reducing congestion and greenhouse gas emissions to protect the environment and improve the quality of life for our families and communities. The visionary work of municipal leaders in shaping the regional transportation plan, appropriately titled the Big Move, is in step with our transit objectives for the most populated region in Ontario. We all want seamless transit, better service, quick commute times and cleaner air. These are gathering points for everyone, including our many stakeholders and important voices from the business community.

After years of underfunding and inaction by successive governments, the McGuinty government has put transit among its top priorities. Our commitment of \$11.5 billion in the regional transportation plan made Canadian history as the largest single commitment in public transit. This investment will strengthen our economy: 10,000 jobs are generated by every billion invested in public transit.

Since 2003, we have also invested an additional \$7.4 billion in transit, including more than \$2.5 billion in GO Transit.

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Leading Canadian economists have recently emphasized the high rate of economic return in infrastructure spending. They recognize that money for transit projects invigorates the economy and creates valuable assets that spur business growth and make life better. Our government is investing in infrastructure when our economy needs it most.

I'm also pleased to announce Robert Prichard as a transition adviser for the merger, and a transition advisory board to help bring the two organizations together. The transition advisory board will include Rob MacIsaac as chair and Peter Smith as vice-chair.

I would like to acknowledge some of our guests who have joined us here today in support of our proposed legislation, including Robert Prichard, Rob MacIsaac, Peter Smith and Mayor Hazel McCallion.

We want the new Metrolinx to have a board comprised of people with a range of professional and corporate experience, people with backgrounds in customer service, planning, law, and financing large capital projects. We decided on this type of board after examining how other large transit agencies around the world are structured. I also draw the attention of this House to the work of the current Metrolinx and GO Transit boards, whose work and contributions have been exemplary. I thank them most sincerely.

Our proposal would require the new Metrolinx to be guided by the regional transportation plan to ensure those projects in the plan are built expeditiously. Municipalities are crucial partners in this effort, and we will continue to work with them to knit together a regional transit network that will serve all their constituents most effectively.

The proposed legislation would also require Metrolinx to consult with all municipalities in the GTHA on any changes to the plan.

Our actions today bring the implementation of a regional transit and transportation network and our aspirations for the environment and our economy into sharper focus. I know our transit agenda is ambitious, but we cannot wait for the next generation to act. We look forward to working together with all our partners to make this happen and I encourage all members of the House to support this bill.

PARALEGALS

PROFESSION DE PARAJURISTE

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I'm pleased to rise in the House today to mark over two years of successful paralegal regulation in the province of Ontario, and I want to take, at the outset, a moment to recognize the following people from the Law Society of Upper Canada in the members' gallery: treasurer Derry Millar; former treasurers Justice Frank Marrocco and Gavin MacKenzie; Paul Dray, the chair of the paralegal standing committee; and William Simpson, Stephen Parker, Margaret Louter, Brian Lawrie, Michelle Haigh, Julia Bass, Sheena Weir, Katherine Corrick, and the Honourable Doug Lewis, PC. Acknowledgment for them, too.

Avec l'adoption de la Loi de 2006 sur l'accès à la justice, notre province est devenue la première province canadienne à réglementer la profession de parajuriste pour protéger les utilisateurs de services juridiques et reconnaître les contributions des parajuristes au système de justice. En réglementant les parajuristes, nous avons donné aux consommateurs un choix de services juridiques qualifiés, tout en protégeant les gens qui obtiennent des services juridiques auprès de personnes qui ne sont pas des avocats.

Through the Access to Justice Act, 2006, this province was the first Canadian jurisdiction to regulate paralegals to benefit consumers of legal services and to recognize the contributions paralegals make to the justice system. By regulating paralegals, we have given consumers a choice in qualified legal services while protecting people who get legal advice from non-lawyers. In short, we've given people greater access to the system of justice.

We've also given the public increased confidence in the paralegal profession. Ontarians know that paralegals, like lawyers, doctors and teachers, are licensed, have insurance and the necessary education to provide the best service possible. Before regulation was in place, paralegals could provide legal services without receiving

training, carrying liability insurance or reporting to a public body that could investigate complaints against them. The McGuinty government believes that by regulating paralegals we have encouraged qualified, independent paralegals to continue to provide quality service to the public.

I have said many times in the past few months that justice is a trust we hold for the people of Ontario. It must work for all of the people in the province and be accessible to all. It makes sense to have different kinds of legal practitioners in our justice system. With paralegal regulation, we wanted to enhance access to justice for those Ontarians who cannot afford a lawyer, but we also wanted to ensure that consumers who use the services of paralegals are protected. Regulation has many benefits to both the public and the profession. It strikes a balance between consumer protection and access to justice; it strengthens the role of paralegals in Ontario.

Through the Access to Justice Act, 2006, our government designated the Law Society of Upper Canada as the body to oversee the regulation of paralegals. We believed it was best positioned to assume the role, as it had the experience and the ability to regulate professionals providing legal services. Today, I'm pleased to table a two-year follow-up report from the law society that assesses whether the law society's recommendations in its 2004 task force report on paralegal regulation had been followed. The report confirms that the 2004 recommendations have been closely adopted.

I'd like to thank the law society for their dedication and their hard work. I want to particularly acknowledge the paralegal standing committee for taking the lead and implementing paralegal regulation for the law society. Within the required timelines, the law society, through its paralegal standing committee, put together the necessary regulatory framework and infrastructure to oversee paralegals including an application process, education standards, rules of professional conduct, a licensing process, insurance requirements, a public directory, a complaints and disciplinary process and a compensation fund. Through the whole process, the law society managed to maintain communications with the paralegal community, offering support and encouraging them to transition from their present status to licensed paralegals.

In May 2008, the law society began issuing licences and since then, I'm very pleased to announce, more than 2,300 licences have been issued in this province. It's a good indication of the success of paralegal regulation under the Law Society of Upper Canada. The law society has made tremendous progress so far, and I am confident that it will continue to oversee the regulation of paralegals in the same professional and dedicated manner in which it put the regulatory system in place. We are the only Canadian jurisdiction that regulates paralegals. We're becoming an international leader by creating a system, along with training programs, for qualified paralegals. The law society is playing a key role in changing the scope of legal services in the province. I'd like to thank them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Statements by ministries? Responses?

PARALEGALS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm pleased to respond to the statement made by the Attorney General with respect to the regulation of paralegals on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus.

On October 19, 2006, the Access to Justice Act was passed by the Legislature and received royal assent, providing, among other matters, for the regulation of paralegals. The act required paralegals to receive training, carry liability insurance and report to a public body that could investigate complaints. The impetus for the act was the concern expressed by members of the public and by many paralegals about the unprofessional and unethical conduct of a few rogue members of their profession. I recall the hearings on Bill 14, the Access to Justice Act, very clearly because it was the first bill that I dealt with in my role as Attorney General critic following my election to this Legislature.

At that time, the Progressive Conservative caucus agreed with the principle of paralegal regulation, but expressed some concern about the Law Society of Upper Canada becoming the governing body. I'm pleased to say that those concerns have been allayed. In November 2006, the law society established a paralegal standing committee, the membership of which consisted of both paralegals and benchers—three lay benchers and five lawyer benchers appointed by the society with a non-lawyer majority.

Since their appointment, I understand that the members of the committee have worked long and hard to develop appropriate regulations, and on behalf of the PC caucus, I would like to thank the paralegal standing committee and the Law Society of Upper Canada for their tremendous service to the public.

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As for the McGuinty government, one has to wonder why this particular day was chosen to celebrate this occasion. Could it be because the Ontario Bar Association is sharply critical of their plan to harmonize the PST and the GST, which will result in a higher cost of legal services for hard-working Ontarians? This increased level of costs in an already stressed justice system will surely mean that more and more Ontarians will be denied access to justice. This announcement today is nothing more than a cynical attempt to distract Ontarians from the fact that access to legal services is becoming ever more remote in this province.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to respond on behalf of the PC caucus to the Minister of Transportation's announcement. It's not often in this House that I stand and agree with something that the minister has done, but I'm going to do that today. The reason I'm going to do that today is that what he's doing in this act is something that I

actually called for when we debated the original act, because central to it is the fact that, as much as I have the highest regard for elected officials, being one myself, I believe that this board should in fact have exclusively professionals who know what they're doing when it comes to planning important things such as transit and transportation. This proposal does exactly that.

I want to point out, Minister—and I don't want to totally deflate the minister, although I probably should. I agree with his comment as well when he said that the commitment of \$11.5 billion in the regional transportation plan made Canadian history as the largest single commitment to public transit. He's right: It did make Canadian history when he announced it. What the minister will know is that not one single dollar of that \$11.5-billion announcement has gone out of the Ministry of Transportation—not a single dollar.

Minister, you shake your head. I had a wonderful meeting with your staff this morning, who briefed me on this bill. I asked them this question: "Of the \$11.5 billion that was announced under this plan, how many dollars have gone out?" They said, "None." They did say there was about \$700 million that was transferred out and put into transportation, but not of the \$11.5 billion. So we have lots to look forward to, Minister, and often the devil is in the details. I made some suggestions to staff about some of the concerns that I have and I'm sure that we'll have an opportunity to work that out.

Let me say, in conclusion, on behalf of our caucus I want to thank the members of the current board of GO and the current board of Metrolinx and the leadership of both boards for their service to this province and the very selfless act of stepping aside in favour of the new board that will be appointed. I know that they will continue to support that good work. Transportation and transit is without question a priority for this province, and we want to ensure that the right thing is done. I believe this is a step in the right direction.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Peter Tabuns: First of all I have to say, don't break out the champagne. What can I say, Minister? I look at the bill. I know that we have huge demands in this community, huge needs for action on rapid transit. Everyone is aware of the gridlock that is paralyzing the greater Toronto and Hamilton areas and everyone is aware of the air pollution that kills thousands of people a year. What we see today is a bill that will not deal with one of the fundamental problems, and that's the problem of money. There's no question that the Metrolinx regional transportation plan is slated to cost \$55 billion. There's no indication where that money will come from, and frankly, we won't even know for a number of years.

The McGuinty government announced \$11.6 billion for Move Ontario, but the money's not out the door. The government has announced a ream of new projects dependent on Ottawa kicking in. If you are standing on a GO platform somewhere waiting for a train, don't expect it to come faster based on this bill.

PARALEGALS

Mr. Peter Kormos: Access to justice, my foot. McGuinty jacks up already exorbitant legal fees by 8% and he calls that increasing or enhancing access to justice? This just doesn't cut it out there in the real world with real Ontarians.

In an unprecedented move, 12 Family Court judges in some of the busiest Family Courts in this province made a written submission to the social policy committee as it's considering Bill 133. These judges have pinpointed one of the most acute problems that we have in our justice system. Access? I'm afraid not. I'm quoting from their letter:

"Vast numbers of Family Court litigants are unable to retain lawyers to represent them. For the past number of years, legal services in our courts have been delivered primarily by per diem duty counsel.... Parties who by any calculation are 'the working poor' do not qualify for legal aid. They do not even qualify for duty counsel services. They are unrepresented."

And I insert here now that even if you do qualify for legal aid, there are precious few family lawyers who will take on family litigation with a legal aid certificate because of the cap on hours. I go back to the letter:

"Those people who do qualify for duty counsel services, (although not for legal aid) are represented by counsel who have inadequate time to interview them to ensure that their cases can be presented properly to the court. Duty counsel do not assist in the preparation of motions and affidavits. Duty counsel do not represent parties at motions or trials. Pleadings are drafted by volunteer law students or by self-represented parties, who have limited knowledge of the evidentiary requirements of relevance and reliability. Duty counsel do not maintain files. A party coming to court twice will likely see two different duty counsel. There is no continuity.

"The role of counsel, which is critical to a properly functioning legal system, is no longer being filled by retained lawyers who are bound by ethical duties not only to advance their client's interest, but also to ensure that relevant, admissible and reliable evidence is before the court in child custody cases. Parties must represent themselves."

Any judge will tell you, whether it's in our criminal courts, civil courts or Family Courts, that unrepresented parties put a great strain on the system. They are effectively the blockers for matters proceeding smoothly through the system. They take an inappropriate amount of a judge's time, because the judge has to exercise a role that goes beyond the mere neutral role of being an arbiter. And this government has done nothing to enhance access to legal representations, especially at the Family Court level, where the largest number of litigants seeking assistance are women with their children, who are victimized by being brutalized, who are victimized financially or who are suffering because of this government's minimum wage policy and being forced to work at sub-living-level-income jobs.

So this government has a long way to go before it can brag about any enhanced access to justice. This government has a long way to go before it can talk about justice at all for people in our criminal, family or civil court systems.

It raises the limits on Small Claims Court, but all that will do is bog down Small Claims Court with larger and larger pieces of litigation that add to the complexity of that court, and again, that push the unrepresented litigant aside.

Adequate funding for legal aid is right at the top; family law clinics across the province, especially in northern Ontario in those remote communities, where access to justice becomes even more difficult—I'm talking about places like at Peawanuck, Attawapiskat and those small, marginalized communities in the far north and the near north as well; and, I say to you, Attorney General, ensuring that there's adequate court staff, judges and spaces so that litigants can have their matters dealt with in a timely manner.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 98(c), changes have been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business, such that Mrs. Mitchell assumes ballot item number 10 and Mr. Dhillon assumes ballot item number 54, and Mr. Brown assumes ballot item 15 and Mr. Crozier assumes ballot item 57.

MEMBERS' ANNIVERSARIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to take this opportunity as well to wish the member from Toronto—Danforth, Peter Tabuns, the member from Whitby—Oshawa, Christine Elliott, and the member from Nepean—Carleton, Lisa MacLeod, a happy third anniversary. I hope you've enjoyed your past three years in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with the Burk's Falls health centre, and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Burk's Falls and District Health Centre provides vital health services for residents of Burk's Falls and the Almaguin Highlands of all ages, as well as seasonal residents and tourists; and

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"Whereas the health centre helps to reduce demand on the Huntsville hospital emergency room; and

"Whereas the operating budget for Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is insufficient to meet the growing

demand for service in the communities of Muskoka–East Parry Sound; and

“Whereas budget pressures could jeopardize continued operation of the Burk’s Falls health centre;

“Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the McGuinty government and Minister of Health provide adequate increases in the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to maintain current health services, including those provided by the Burk’s Falls health centre.”

I support this petition and give it to page Emily.

CEMETERIES

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from a number of constituents from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s cemeteries are an important part of our cultural heritage; and

“Whereas Ontario’s inactive cemeteries are constantly at risk of closure and removal; and

“Whereas Ontario’s cemeteries are an irreplaceable part of the province’s cultural heritage;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“The government must pass Bill 149, the Inactive Cemeteries Protection Act, 2009, to prohibit the relocation of inactive cemeteries in the province of Ontario.”

As I agree with the petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks’ table.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance; and

“Whereas the removal of the temporary care assistance could mean that children will be forced into foster care; and

“Whereas the temporary care assistance amounted to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would receive to look after the same children if they were forced into foster care;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse the decision to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren.”

I support this petition and am pleased to affix my signature to it.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relationships between the children and their grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant’s willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children’s Law Reform Act as above to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and grandparents.”

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send to the clerks’ table.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I’m pleased to present this petition today to the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario. I’m pleased as well that a number of friends of mine, including Andrew Durnford of Victoria Harbour and Rod Lundy, put this together on behalf of the citizens of Tay township.

“Tay township, Simcoe county, in the riding of Simcoe North, has a population of 10,000 persons and a taxpayer base of 5,500. There are 2,144 sewer users and 3,038 water users. The burgeoning capital and operating costs as a result of provincially legislated rules and requirements are more than the limited number of taxpayers can afford.

“The following taxpayers petition the Legislature for relief with grant funds. Recent grant applications have all been turned down.”

I’m signing this on behalf of these residents, and am pleased to do so.

CEMETERIES

Mr. Jim Brownell: I do have another petition, and this is from constituents from my riding, and it relates to my private member’s bill, Bill 149. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s cemeteries are an important part of our cultural heritage; and

"Whereas Ontario's inactive cemeteries are constantly at risk of closure and removal; and

"Whereas Ontario's cemeteries are an irreplaceable part of the province's cultural heritage;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government must pass Bill 149, the Inactive Cemeteries Protection Act, 2009, to prohibit the relocation of inactive cemeteries in the province of Ontario."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks' table.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I have another petition to the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario.

"Tay township, Simcoe county, in the riding of Simcoe North, has a population of 10,000 persons and a taxpayer base of 5,500. There are 2,144 sewer users and 3,038 water users. The burgeoning capital and operating costs as a result of provincially legislated rules and requirements are more than the limited number of taxpayers can afford.

"The following taxpayers petition the Legislature for relief with grant funds. Recent grant applications have all been turned down."

I'm pleased to sign this on behalf of my constituents.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition in support of all of our vulnerable foreign workers.

"Whereas a number of foreign worker and caregiver recruitment agencies have exploited vulnerable foreign workers" and nannies;

"Whereas foreign workers are subject to illegal fees and abuse at the hands of some of these unscrupulous recruiters; and

"Whereas the federal government in Ottawa has failed to protect foreign workers from these abuses; and

"Whereas, in Ontario, the former Conservative government deregulated and eliminated protection for foreign workers; and

"Whereas a great number of foreign workers and caregivers perform outstanding and difficult tasks on a daily basis in their work, with limited protection;

"We, the undersigned, support ... the Caregiver and Foreign Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, 2009, and urge its speedy passage into law."

I support this petition, and I will affix my name to it.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm going to read these in today.

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario:

"Tay township, Simcoe county, in the riding of Simcoe North, has a population of 10,000 persons and a

taxpayer base of 5,500. There are 2,144 sewer users and 3,038 water users. The burgeoning capital and operating costs as a result of provincially legislated rules and requirements are more than the limited number of taxpayers can afford.

"The following taxpayers petition the Legislature for relief with grant funds. Recent grant applications have all been turned down."

I'm pleased to sign this on behalf of my constituents, and I'll pass it to Renée to bring to the table.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: I have another petition to stop the drive-by shootings that are occurring all over this country and province.

"Whereas there are a growing number of drive-by shootings and gun crimes in our communities;

"Whereas only police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are allowed to possess handguns;

"Whereas a growing number of illegal handguns are transported, smuggled and being found in cars driven in our communities;

"Whereas impounding cars and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing illegal guns on the spot by the police will make our communities safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56 ... entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law so that we can reduce the number of drive-by shootings and gun crimes in our communities."

I support the legislation, and I affix my name to the petition.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm not sure where everybody is today with petitions. Usually I have a hard time getting up.

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario:

"Tay township, Simcoe county, in the riding of Simcoe North, has a population of 10,000 persons and a taxpayer base of 5,500. There are 2,144 sewer users and 3,038 water users. The burgeoning capital and operating costs as a result of provincially legislated rules and requirements are more than the limited number of taxpayers can afford.

"The following taxpayers petition the Legislature for relief with grant funds. Recent grant applications have all been turned down."

I'm pleased to sign that on behalf of my constituents.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform

Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

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"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act as above to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with the petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks' table.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario. Again it comes from my friends Andrew Durnford and Rod Lundy, who put this all together.

"Tay township, Simcoe county, in the riding of Simcoe North, has a population of 10,000 persons and a taxpayer base of 5,500. There are 2,144 sewer users and 3,038 water users. The burgeoning capital and operating costs as a result of provincially legislated rules and requirements are more than the limited number of taxpayers can afford.

"The following taxpayers petition the Legislature for relief with grant funds. Recent grant applications have all been turned down."

I'm pleased to sign that on behalf of my constituents and pass it to Michael to bring it to the table.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition from a lot of unemployed workers in my riding who are trying to get fairness for EI.

"Whereas the federal government's employment insurance surplus now stands at \$54 billion; and

"Whereas over 75% of Ontario's unemployed are not eligible for employment insurance because of Ottawa's unfair eligibility rules; and

"Whereas an Ontario worker has to work more weeks to qualify and receives fewer weeks of benefits than other Canadian unemployed workers; and

"Whereas the average Ontario unemployed worker gets \$4,000 less in EI benefits than unemployed workers in" Prince Edward Island or in New Brunswick or in Quebec or all the "other provinces and thus, unemployed are not qualifying for many retraining programs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to" do something about it and "press the federal government to reform the employment insurance program and to end the discrimination and unfairness towards Ontario's unemployed workers."

I fully support Ontario's unemployed workers in their quest for EI fairness, and I affix my name to it.

WYE MARSH WILDLIFE CENTRE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: This one's on the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, and it is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, located in the township of Tay, manages approximately 3,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land which is owned by the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas over 50,000 people visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year; and

"Whereas over 20,000 students from across Ontario visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year, receiving curriculum-based environmental education not available in schools; and

"Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre receives no stable funding from any level of government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the province of Ontario to establish a reasonable and stable long-term funding formula so that the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre can continue to operate and exist into the future."

I'm pleased to sign this and pass it to Olivia to present to the table.

TOM LONGBOAT

Mr. Mike Colle: I've got a petition in support of the great Canadian Tom Longboat.

"Whereas Tom Longboat, a proud son of the Onondaga Nation, was one of the most internationally celebrated athletes in Canadian history;

"Whereas Tom Longboat's record-breaking marathon runs made him a Canadian and international athletic superstar;

"Whereas Tom Longboat fought bravely for Canada in World War I and was wounded twice as he served his country;

"Whereas Tom Longboat is a proud symbol of the outstanding achievements and contributions of Canada's aboriginal people;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario, so that we can ensure this legendary Canadian hero is not forgotten."

I support all the people who are trying to recognize Tom Longboat, and I affix my name to the petition.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: This will likely clean it up. It's a petition to the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario.

"Tay township, Simcoe county, in the riding of Simcoe North, has a population of 10,000 persons and a taxpayer base of 5,500. There are 2,144 sewer users and 3,038 water users. The burgeoning capital and operating costs as a result of provincially legislated rules and requirements are more than the limited number of taxpayers can afford.

"The following taxpayers petition the Legislature for relief with grant funds. Recent grant applications have all been turned down."

I'm pleased to sign that on behalf of my constituents and give it to Victoria to present.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The time for duelling petitions having expired, I call for orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. Brad Duguid: I think this is probably more on a point of order. I believe we have unanimous consent to move forward a motion regarding speaking rotation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Do we have consent? Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Brad Duguid: The motion is the following: that, notwithstanding the practice of rotation, the member for Pickering-Scarborough East be permitted to speak immediately following the mover of the motion for second reading of Bill 161.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

SUPPLY ACT, 2009

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2009

Mr. Duguid, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 161, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009 / Projet de loi 161, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2009.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Ajax-Pickering—no. I'm having trouble today. Something Scarborough East.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm sure my friend from Ajax-Pickering will appreciate the acknowledgment in the Legislature this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. Thank you so much for recognizing me and the deputy House leader.

I'm pleased to rise today in the Legislature to be able to speak to Bill 161, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

The Supply Act is one of those cornerstone acts in the Legislature, and it's one that is proposed by the government. If passed, this bill would give the government the necessary authority, as any government needs, to finance the programs that it sets out, to fulfill the commitments that governments make and put the vision that a government has into practice. I'm certainly going to urge all members of the Legislature, when the debate concludes on Bill 161, to support it, because without the necessary spending authority, no government of any stripe would be able to meet its obligations to the people of Ontario. Thus, it's one of those annual activities that are so crucially important to the functioning of the province of Ontario and its government.

The government's interim spending authority for the fiscal year ending March 31 is provided through the interim appropriations act, 2008, and the supplementary interim appropriations act, 2008, pending the voting of supply and the enactment of the Supply Act. As a result, Bill 161 would repeal those two particular statutes. Without this authority, the government would be unable to make most of its scheduled and unscheduled payments and to implement the initiatives that exist within budgetary priorities.

As you know, this is the first piece of legislation that's being debated subsequent to the minister introducing the 2009-10 budget just last Thursday, March 26, here in the Legislature. I want to share with the members of the Legislature, in a limited amount of time that's being provided, the highlights of some of the plans that we have and have had to allow Ontario to grow yet stronger.

It's no secret that Ontario, like most jurisdictions in the world, is feeling the impacts and the effects of an economic crisis. This is not news to anyone here, nor, frankly, is it news around the world. The impact on economic growth, jobs and investments is directly affecting this province's individuals, its families, its communities and its businesses. Job losses have been hurting families. Communities have lost mills and factories, and our government revenues, our outlooks, have declined significantly compared to what we saw with the 2008-09 budget outlook. As a matter of fact, Speaker, you will have heard the Minister of Finance speak to this matter in the Legislature, talking about the revenue cycle stream sort of "falling off the cliff," as I think was his phraseology in September of last year—a very dramatic turn of events at that point in time.

The challenge is significant, but it's one that the people of Ontario will meet and they will overcome. We

will see the end of this economic cycle and look forward, then, to a much more positive outcome, and certainly our 2009-10 budget takes immediate steps to make Ontario more competitive, both now and in the future.

A strong, competitive economy helps families and businesses in this province take advantage of the next generation of growth that we all look so much forward to, while maintaining and enhancing the province's cherished public services, a hallmark of this government, in continued support of public service within the province of Ontario.

1400

Our plan undertakes initiatives in a variety of sectors, in communities, for families, that continue to face additional external challenges that have been well spoken of by many in the Legislature over the past number of months.

The Premier is very fond of saying that for the economy to truly succeed, for Ontario to succeed, we need every Ontarian at their very best. There's no question about that. We need to put in place and continue to support policies that provide opportunity for every Ontarian. When each of us are at our best, then Ontario can be at its best.

Prudent planning allowed us to invest in the people of Ontario while we paid down some of the provincial debt and cut the cost of doing business within the province of Ontario.

Five years ago, the government was elected on its commitment to improve the public services throughout Ontario that we require to reach our full potential: public education, universal health care, modern infrastructure, support for vulnerable citizens within our communities—and to create a greener Ontario.

Between 2003 and 2008, the province experienced strong revenue growth. This period of growth and prosperity allowed our government to make much-needed investments in key public services. For five years, the government invested in these public services to help ensure that Ontarians do indeed reach their full potential. We managed spending prudently, not allowing average expenditure growth to exceed our revenue growth. We eliminated the hidden \$5.5-billion deficit left from the previous government, and our debt-to-GDP ratio is lower than when we came into office. Today, there are more teachers in our classrooms, there are more students in our colleges and universities, more families have a family doctor, and patients have shorter wait times for surgeries and other medical procedures.

It's important that we look back at the successes over the past five years to understand that the policies of the government, both past and current, improved the lives and the public services of Ontarians and have grown our economy. As we come out of this particular recessionary period, it's important to look back to understand what we've accomplished, to understand what we can look forward to in the future.

The Ontario child benefit is providing children who grow up in low- and middle-income families with a better

start in life. Our partnerships with cities and towns throughout this province are leading to infrastructure development across Ontario. We've invested in innovative companies, and we've cut business taxes. I can tell you it wasn't that long ago that the Premier was in my riding for an announcement regarding Purdue Pharma Canada and expenditures there in the pharmaceutical industry on new, innovative research opportunities.

Our government, though, saw that there were economic storm clouds on the horizon some time ago, and as a result, we laid a foundation in preparation for what has transpired. No one could have seen the depths to which the economy has changed, but certainly we were aware that there was change on the horizon. We are able to continue to support Ontarians because of the five-point economic plan that we put in place. The plan encourages growth and job creation through ongoing investments in skills and knowledge, infrastructure, partnerships, and lowering the costs of doing business here in Ontario.

Our government prepared for this economic storm by investing over \$18 billion in infrastructure over the last two years. As we look forward, as a result of this budgetary commitment, to expenditures beyond \$30 billion in infrastructure on a go-forward basis, certainly the \$18 billion worth of investment during the past two years is nothing to sneeze at. It laid out a framework for work that's actually going on today. This is not a matter of having shovel-ready projects that we might be able to start in the weeks and months ahead. These are projects that are currently underway here in the province of Ontario. I can tell you that the Durham consolidated courthouse in downtown Oshawa is one of those types of projects and, as it works its way to completion, has been an important economic stimulus within that region.

Shovels are in the ground now, and we created and sustained more than 85,000 jobs in 2007-08 and more than 100,000 jobs during the past economic year.

Our investments over the previous years will strengthen the long-term economic productivity, stimulating investment and job growth today, and moving us to a greener, more sustainable future here in Ontario.

In 2008, our budget proposed a number of tax cuts and regulatory reforms to reduce the costs for business and enhance the quality of life of Ontarians. Our government has invested in the people of Ontario so that Ontario can continue to compete.

Among the most significant investments we have time to speak to would be matters of investment in education, whether it's elementary schools, secondary schools or post-secondary educational investments. We have more students graduating from secondary school, we have smaller class sizes in the elementary system, and we have more students in both post-secondary and in graduate programs, which will stand us well into the future as we move through this economic cycle.

I said that I would be keeping my remarks short. I know that there are others in the Legislature who want to speak to this particular bill, and I know that later this afternoon we'll be hearing from the leader of the official

opposition in respect to his comments on the budget that we put forward. I'm sure that his comments will be received with mixed reviews within this Legislature. The supply bill, though, is important for us to ensure that the programs that I've mentioned are able to be fulfilled and carried out.

In conclusion, the Supply Act is an important act because it allows the business of government to continue. I hope, when the speeches conclude today on this bill, that all members of the House will find it within their means to be able to support Bill 161.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise today to make a few comments on the supply bill and thank everyone for the opportunity to do so. Like my colleague who went just prior to me, I want to talk a little bit about the economy: where we've been in the past, where we're heading and the sort of problems we probably have in front of us.

One of the things that I'm curious about with the government is some of the excuses they like to use when it comes to deficits and surpluses and all those sorts of things. They continually relate to 2003 and the deficit they inherited halfway through the year. I believe it was \$5.6 billion; that's the number they continue to use, anyhow. Throughout that whole year and right through to today I have never, ever heard the government once acknowledge the fact that that was the same year as the blackout that we had here in the province, the SARS epidemic that hit and caused a tremendous loss of revenues to tourism, the mad cow disease etc. There were a lot of problems that year, and that was at the end of a time period when the former Progressive Conservative government had an economy in place that created a million jobs here in the province of Ontario. They'd never give us credit for that, ever, and they've never given us credit for the fact that there were a million jobs created under the Mike Harris regime.

However, when we look at the budget, the first thing out of the finance minister's mouth was the following:

"I rise to present Ontario's 2009 budget."

Ontario "is in the middle of a global economic and financial storm.

"Our communities are caught in it.

"Many of our families and our friends are hurt by it.

"No place in the world is immune from it."

It's everybody's fault; it's the whole world's problem, then. Everybody is at fault; it's not one thing to do with Dalton McGuinty, not one thing to do with the Liberal government here in the province of Ontario. They're going to try to—no matter what happens over the next seven or eight years, you can be sure of one thing: It will not be Dalton McGuinty's fault, because he's trying to deflect it to everyone else that he possibly can.

One of the things that I think is important, because this is a bill that talks about government having money to pay its bills—we have to look at the past. From Confederation, 1867, through to 2003, the provincial debt grew

from zero to \$67 billion. From 2003 until 2009, the budget has now gone to \$109 billion in spending—not in revenues; in spending. That's an increase of \$42 billion. On top of that, the government plan calls for another \$38 billion to be added to the deficit as we move through to the year 2015-16. So if you add that together, \$42 billion and \$38 billion are \$80 billion. That's what the plan is. From 2003 to 2015-16, an \$80-billion increase in spending. Remember, we only went to \$67 billion from Confederation to 2003.

1410

I'm not sure how wisely the government spends its money. Like the former Bob Rae government, they think they can spend their way out of this economic downturn. Now that we're well into it, I wish them well. I can tell you one thing: This is our children's future we're spending right now. When you're giving out 3%, 4% and 5% pay increases per year, we're borrowing money from our children to pay for those increases. That's a bit of a worry to me because it seems to be a stimulus package for government spending in the budget, and I'm not 100% sure that the government is the best person to lead the attack on creating an economy to create jobs.

We don't have a lot of time to talk about this today, but I wanted to mention a number of things that are important to me. If we're going to try to spend our way out of this economic downturn and hopefully can recover by 2015-16 and get back to a balanced budget, I'm hoping there are a number of things that we can deal with. One of them is hospitals. I'll acknowledge that there has been money spent in the redevelopment of hospitals. Both the Progressive Conservative government and this government have put a lot of money into construction of facilities across the province of Ontario.

I'm happy with the redevelopment of the Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital in my riding. It's an exciting redevelopment of a hospital, with a big addition and a lot of repairs and improvements to the old section. However, already the administration staff and some of the board members have mentioned to me that they're very concerned about the deficit they'll face this year. They've had to sign accountability agreements with the local LHIN. I can tell you that, as we move forward, the LHIN only has so much money to divide up. It comes right back to the ministry. At this point, it is my understanding that they will be facing a substantial deficit.

Over the previous few years, at the end of every fiscal year there was always some money to help the hospitals. I believe there's 2.1% in the budget this year to assist the hospitals. It's my understanding that that won't be enough. A lot of the hospitals across the province—I believe that something like 70% of them are in a deficit position—will be in the position that you're going to have to either bail them out or we're going to see massive layoffs and a reduction in health care services across the province. We'll be watching that very carefully.

I also want to talk for a moment about community colleges. The community college system, of course, was established by Bill Davis over 40 years ago when he was

the Minister of Education. It's one of the finest community college systems we have in the world. I do know, and we mention it here all the time in the House, that it is a system that has the lowest per capita funding in our country. I've talked to a number of presidents and deans of some of the satellite campuses, not only Georgian College but other community colleges in our district, and most of them are facing deficit positions this year. Again, although we've got a lot of money in the budget and we tried to spend \$109 billion, there are very little increases for community colleges this year. There will be some issues facing them, as either they'll have to raise tuition rates or they'll have to get additional government assistance to carry forward.

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: No, they'll have to raise tuition rates. There's no question about it. You should check it out with the presidents of your community colleges. I've checked with mine, and we've got problems—big problems—and they need to have substantial increases.

That takes us to something that's very important to me, because I have a strong advocate in my riding from the Midland Area Reading Council who has been pointing out to me for the last year or so the difficult position that a lot of the community-based literacy programs are in across the province of Ontario. As you know, we've seen a huge loss of manufacturing jobs here in Ontario, almost 300,000. Many of the people who are laid off or their jobs are gone forever—the plant relocates, goes bankrupt or whatever it may be—many people who lose their jobs find it very, very devastating to begin with. The first act of devastation is losing their job; the second is to find out they can't properly fill out a resumé for a future job.

I know that in the budget—I'll read what the budget says, and I'm hoping we can move forward on this: "In addition to creating more than 100,000 summer jobs for students this year, we will expand training and literacy programs and propose to make the apprenticeship training tax credit the most generous in Canada." That's before they dump on the federal government right below it, with the \$4,000 in unemployment insurance. But I was happy to see the word "literacy" at least mentioned in the budget, because I think it's an area that we have to spend a lot of extra time on. We can look at some of the programs that are run across the province.

I know that the boards of education and the community colleges also run literacy programs. However, the community-based programs have been basically frozen for the last 10 years. It was good to see the word "literacy" mentioned in the budget, and I'm asking all members of this House to ask the Minister of Finance or ask the government to move forward and to help the community-based programs.

They're not asking for the world. The program we have running out of Midland gets around \$60,000 a year, and the rest of it's basically run by volunteers to help people to learn how to read and write. It has been very successful, but the biggest problem we're finding now is

that more and more people are coming through the door almost each and every day because of their loss of jobs. They're not people who want to be laid off; these are people who want a job. Some of them have been working 20, 30 years. They want to have a job in their community and are finding that they lack some of the skills they need to proceed. They can't get those skills with the Second Career program, community college or school board until they pass a very basic literacy test up front.

We passed a resolution in this House a few weeks ago. Everyone supported it here, and I thank them for that. I hope we can move forward and actually prop this up fairly well with some funding that will help these community-based literacy programs right across our province. I believe there are 111 of them, and they are important to our communities and are important to a lot of people who I think right now are falling through the cracks.

There's one other thing I wanted to say about that. This estimated job creation of 100,000 summer jobs: I'm concerned about that. When we're seeing so many plants closing their doors, I just can't quite figure out where the 100,000 summer jobs will actually come from. I'm hoping that in our budget deliberations, which will start this afternoon, the government can point out when those programs will be released and when we can actually see some really strong programming put in place to show where those 100,000 jobs will come from.

As well, the Premier has said on a couple of occasions now that he expects the infrastructure funding or the deficit—what I should really say is the deficit that will be created because of the stimulus package. I'm wondering as well how those jobs will be created, because it's easy to say 300,000 jobs here or 50,000 jobs with the Green Energy Act, but I really don't have any idea and I haven't seen any indication or any data that would back up how that would be put in place and how the government will actually roll those jobs out.

I did want to say that as we go through the spending programs, I wanted to put a couple of things on the record. One of the things we've seen in our area—and I know the government, when they came into power, talked about never closing another school and all these sorts of things. We're seeing more pressure. I think this is the first time since the founding of our local school boards where we're not seeing where schools are going to expand, but we're actually seeing plans put in place by some of the school boards to close down some schools. I know in Orillia they're talking about closing down both Park Street Collegiate Institute and ODCVI and maybe building one new one. We're not sure where that's going at this point.

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I think we have to be really careful when we start closing these, particularly secondary schools, because as the province continues to grow, particularly in central Ontario, the GTA and western Ontario, it may be a terrible error to close some of those schools. Down the road, we could be looking at adding a number of porta-

bles to the new school and not really be accomplishing anything other than getting rid of a couple of fairly good schools.

Moving over to the infrastructure for a second, I know that we've had the Canada-Ontario infrastructure program put in place in the province of Ontario, I believe since about 1993. I think it was Mr. Chrétien and Mr. Bob Rae who put the original plans in place. Since then, we've had a lot of programs from all different parties and all different governments, both at the provincial and federal level. Some have been funded at 33%-33%-33% and others at 20%-20%-60%, that sort of thing. However, one of the things I'd recommend to the government—what I've seen happening in my own community and my own smaller townships is that we are seeing a problem with the water system users in the smaller municipalities. Their rates are much, much higher than in the municipalities with more water users. So it becomes a problem, and I'd like to see the government—and we'll work on it with our party, at least—work on some kind of a strategy where we can come up with a plan that will better help those.

I can tell you that I've read a few petitions in here today from the township of Tay. It's a township in the riding of Simcoe North. I can tell you that the water and sewer users in the township of Tay now pay \$1,620 a year. That's probably five times the rate of water use in the town of Midland or the town of Penetanguishene. I think it's \$300 for sewer and water there.

A lot of the people simply cannot afford these high water bills. They've followed all the recommendations of the government—the Clean Water Act, nutrient management in order to put that all in place. Now we're finding that people have to sell their houses because of these water and sewer rates. The township of Tay has only received one small grant, originally for one road, to put the water down, and it was something like \$600,000. They received no money under COMRIF for major expansions of the water and sewer system to accommodate the Clean Water Act and the other COMRIF programs that were available.

It's an issue that I think they've got a lot of background and a lot of data on, and they're trying to actually come up with a plan to submit to AMO. I'm hoping that, in the end, we as a Parliament can treat these small rural municipalities and their water and sewer users on a more fair basis. I think it's important that we move in that direction.

A couple of other things that I wanted to mention in the debate here today: where infrastructure money will be spent. If we're going to have this \$38-billion or \$40-billion, \$45-billion accumulated deficit, I'm hoping the money can be spent wisely in all areas across the province.

There are two things in Simcoe county that I think are extremely important at this time. One is the commitment made a couple years ago in the budget for the redevelopment of the Oak Ridge Facility at Penetanguishene's mental health centre. They've already divested from the

board. There's a new board working at the hospital now. I think they're doing a good job, and they have to move forward with the redevelopment and the infrastructure investment in it. It's not a cheap system. I believe it's something like \$300 million for this particular project, but they followed all the rules and met the divestment criteria, and as we move forward—in the next couple of years, I'm hoping—I'll be working with the ministries and the ministers to make sure that that money is on the table and those projects can go ahead.

I know that in the city of Barrie, which Minister Carroll represents, they also have the planned expansion of the Royal Victoria Hospital. It's a huge redevelopment and expansion of the RVH, with the Cancer Care Ontario unit. I think that everybody—not playing politics with it or being partisan about it—in the region wants it to move forward. We're all supportive of it, and I'm hoping that's another infrastructure project we can see.

I did talk very briefly today to the minister about economic development in the middle of central Ontario. One of the plans that we have in place that got turned down in the last Building Canada application was the expansion of the runways of the Lake Simcoe Regional Airport. I've talked to the minister and found out some of the reasons it was probably turned down, but we're hoping that with economic development—Barrie being one of the fastest-growing cities in the province—the use of better air service is a priority for that community and for the communities around it. I'm hoping that as we move forward, we can see the expansion of that runway as well.

This is all borrowed money; it's taxpayers' money that we'll be moving forward with, whether it's the mental health centre, the Royal Victoria Hospital or an airport, but they all require the government to pay special attention to them. As we move forward, I'll be looking forward to seeing those projects started in all these communities.

With that, I'll pass it over to the NDP. Obviously, we will be supporting the Supply Act today; however, we're very interested and very concerned about how tax dollars are being spent at our children's expense in the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm pleased to continue with this debate on the supply bill today. Like the previous speakers, I'll talk a little about what has happened in the past and also what faces us in the future, particularly in light of the budget bill that was introduced by the government on Thursday of last week.

One of the things I want to address is some of the events that have taken place in our province in recent years. Our government, when we were in office from 1995 to 2003, created an environment which allowed the private sector to create new jobs. We were fortunate to see, during that period of time, the creation of one million new jobs by the government, under the leadership of both Mike Harris and Ernie Eves.

Also, I want to set the record straight, because in 2003, when the Liberals were elected in the fall, they

indicated that there was a deficit of about \$5.6 billion. I just want to put on the record the fact that that was a projected deficit—that wasn't a real deficit—because, as we know, the number doesn't become real until March of the year. That deficit was based on the fact that during the summer and that past year, we had experienced events that were totally beyond the control of any government and of any political party.

Of course, that was the year of the lights going out throughout a great part of North America, over which we had absolutely no control.

The other issue was SARS. Of course, the government has recently been forced to deal with the whole issue of C. difficile, and I hope that it has brought them to a greater appreciation of the fact that we are going to be continuing, as we move forward, to find ourselves in situations where there are going to be health care costs involved as these superbugs continue to travel around the world, and unfortunately, create some chaos and some deaths.

I want to set the record straight. It was a projected deficit; it was not a deficit.

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However, thanks to the efforts of this government and the track record that they've had over the past number of years since 2003, we have seen a tremendous amount of reckless spending. We've seen spending beyond what the government was capable of absorbing, and so we have gone now—believe it or not—from having a balanced budget to where we last fall had a \$500-million deficit to where we will have next year a deficit of more than \$14 billion. In fact, it will be a record deficit in the year to come of \$14.1 billion. As my colleague has pointed out—

Mr. Howard Hampton: Not bigger than Bob Rae.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: It's beyond Bob Rae, who has now come full circle and has moved from the NDP ranks to the Liberal ranks and, I guess, brought his tactics with him. Maybe they're taking a lesson.

Anyway, Ontario's budget is going to top the \$100-billion mark for the first time and, as I said, this record deficit of \$14.1 billion. It's a huge change that we're seeing in the province of Ontario. I think we all acknowledge that there is certainly a tremendous amount of economic hardship, and it's being experienced not just in the province of Ontario but certainly in countries throughout the entire world. I think the difference between Ontario and some other provinces and other parts of the world is that this government in good times didn't save money for the bad times. As a result we now have this record deficit that we're looking at next year of \$14.1 billion.

On top of that, taxpayers in this province are being asked to pay even more. In fact, at this time when the economy is in a downturn and when people are suffering and finding it hard from day to day to make ends meet, when they are postponing making purchases of cars, renovations to their home, even enrolling their children in sports programs, buying clothes or postponing holidays,

they're now being asked to pay next year a 13% levy as they blend the provincial and federal sales taxes.

That is going to create a tremendous hardship because many items in this province, and I'm going to speak to some of them later, are now going to be taxed. That's going to be an additional 8%. Whether it's driving your car, whether it's the Internet, whether it's cable, whether it's a haircut, whether it's funeral services, whether it's legal services, it really doesn't matter. You're going to see more in the way of taxes, generally 8% more. That is going to create tremendous hardship. For people who are buying a new home, it is going to add thousands of dollars to homes that are over \$400,000.

Then the government is going to attempt to bribe people with their own money that they have paid in the form of additional taxes and is going to give them supposedly a thousand—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It seems to me I recall this morning during question period that the use of that word was asked to be withdrawn.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I withdraw that word. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

People are going to see the return of that thousand dollars which the government has taken from them in the first place. It's going to flow to them, starting next July, over the course of the next year, and the last instalment will occur just before the 2011 election. So in many respects, yes, people are being given this money back. I guess the government hopes that come the election, they will forget how much they have been forced to pay in the interim.

There are a lot of people who are concerned about the harmonization. The Canadian food and restaurant association has said that the Ontario government is making this "as painful as possible for the province's struggling foods service industry and its customers."

In fact, Stephanie Jones, the vice-president, says, "It's death by a thousand cuts for Ontario's restaurant operators. Our costs are going through the roof, sales are slowing dramatically, and this budget will only worsen the situation for food service operators and their customers."

The Kingston Whig-Standard, in talking about harmonization, says, "Not even audio books for the blind escaped the taxman yesterday."

Of course, the Ontario Real Estate Association says, "Now is not the time to be erecting barriers to home ownership. These additional taxes could price some homebuyers, especially first-time homebuyers, right out of the market."

Greg Pollock, the president and CEO of Advocis, says, "Consumers lose with the new proposed harmonized sales tax as it will now apply to mutual funds, segregated funds and other investment products. This additional tax on management fees will, in the end, reduce investors' net returns." He says, "Given the present circumstances in the markets, investment funds should have been exempt from an Ontario HST."

Of course, Susan Eng from CARP says, "Instead of exempting essential products like home heating fuel, the

government is leaving it to taxpayers to pressure businesses to pass through their savings. Increasing sales tax is no way to stimulate consumer spending and it in fact hurts those who have no choice but to spend on necessities," because the reality is that many of the necessities of life are now going to be taxed by this government.

The Social Planning Network of Ontario says they are deeply concerned "about the Ontario government's plan for harmonizing the PST and GST. Low-income people cannot afford to lose ground as cash is taken out of their pockets for increased taxes on things like gas and electricity, leaving them with less for food and other necessities."

So it doesn't appear that this harmonization of provincial and federal sales tax has been well received at this time in this province as we experienced an economic downturn and many people have lost their jobs and are afraid of losing jobs and are doing what they can in order to make ends meet. We are seeing here, basically, this government putting a tax on almost everything. We know it's going to drive up legal services, and it just has a far-reaching negative impact.

Of course, Kevin Gaudet of the Canadian Taxpayers' Federation says, "The bottom line is, taxes and costs continue to go up and up in Ontario. It's going to be a huge tax hit, especially at a difficult time."

I think we also have to remember, if this deficit is going up to \$14.1 billion, that not only are we going to have to pay in the future in order to eliminate the deficit, but we're now also going to be paying more taxes in paying for the interest on the Premier's record deficit. The last time we saw a shortfall this large, of course, was when the NDP were in power. So, thanks to the McGuinty government, every person in Ontario is going to carry a piece of Ontario's debt worth about \$15,000 to \$16,000.

I think what's most regrettable, and now we have to reach back, is that this is a Premier who always said—when he was elected in the 2003 election and in 2007, he pledged as he was campaigning that, "I'm not going to raise your taxes." People believed him, and he's now broken that promise in at least two elections. We've certainly seen more than two tax increases. In fact, I remember that after 2003, I think he had broken promises about 50 times, and we stopped counting. But this is a Premier who, in 2003, said: "I won't raise your taxes," and he signed the taxpayer protection pledge. The pledge stated: "I, Dalton McGuinty... if my party is elected as the next government ... will not raise taxes or implement any new taxes without the explicit consent of Ontario voters and not run deficits. I promise to abide by the Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act."

Well, guess what? He did break his promise, and he introduced and imposed upon the people of this province the largest single tax hike in the history of this province in his very first budget of March 2004. He imposed the new health tax, and people are paying up to more than \$900 a year. He tried to tell people that this was necessary to balance the budget.

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To date, McGuinty's health tax has taken \$12.2 billion out of the pockets of families and businesses in this province. The tax revenue has grown from \$1.7 billion in 2004-05 to a projected \$2.8 billion in 2008-09, a 65% increase in only five years. At the same time, although people are paying more in the form of health taxes, they are losing access to health care services on a daily and weekly basis. In fact, hospitals in this province are in dire straits. They aren't going to be able to balance their budgets. There are approximately, depending on what day of the week it is, 70% of hospitals that have not been able to balance their budgets. We are seeing beds cut; we're seeing nurses fired; we're seeing services cut. There was an article in the paper today in Hamilton—physiotherapy clinics eliminated. Most hospitals today simply can't afford the outservice clinics, whether it's for physiotherapy, whether it's for asthma, and the list goes on and on. It is, of course, patients, people in the province of Ontario, who suffer.

But take a look at some of the health care services we're losing. St. Mary's hospital in my community announced that they would close 10 beds, three outpatient clinics, the osteoporosis clinic, the medical day clinic for rheumatoid arthritis patients and the physiotherapy program, and eliminate the equivalent of 17 full-time jobs to save \$1.6 million. The South Bruce Grey Health Centre announced that they would privatize physiotherapy services to decrease their deficit, and it would be a for-profit company taking over the services and patients would now be charged.

In addition, when I read Mr. Caplan's House book, it also stated that Deep River and District Hospital discontinued funding of their outpatient physio services in August 2008. In the same House book, it also says that the South Bruce Grey Health Centre Kincardine discontinued funding for outpatient physio services in August 2008. Norfolk General Hospital announced that it would cut the equivalent of 14 full-time jobs and bring its deficit down to zero. They ended an outpatient nutritional counselling service and an off-site cardiac club. The Headwaters Health Care Centre in Orangeville announced they'll be closing the outpatient physiotherapy program, the outpatient heart function clinic and the Shelburne outpatient physician clinic. Guelph General Hospital is raising its parking fees, eliminating its asthma education clinic and will operate with only one mammo-graph machine instead of two to help eliminate its projected \$2.1-million shortfall. Cambridge hospital announced that it will eliminate the equivalent of up to 30 full-time jobs and reduce access to surgery and diagnostic tests. Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre announced cuts, and Ottawa Hospital. The list goes on and on.

This government is not spending money in a way that is going to lead to increased-quality patient care. I know that the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario is very concerned that the 9,000 nurses that were promised by Premier McGuinty are not going to be allocated as

planned and only 900 positions are going to be funded this year. We have a severe nursing shortage, and we have hospitals facing severe deficits that need to be dealt with.

Despite the rhetoric, in the province of Ontario the situation remains grave for taxpayers and patients. We're going to be passing this supply bill today, but we do so in a time when certainly the economic future for people in the province of Ontario is not rosy. We're going to have a high deficit. It's going to mean that the government must develop a plan to deal with it, which also means that taxpayers in this province are going to have to pay to eliminate that deficit. They're also going to have to be paying additional interest now. All of it is the result of a government that, during the good days, wasn't able to plan for this, so that's the situation we find ourselves in.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: Once a year we get to stand up and talk about supply, and once a year the same thing is always the case: The government needs the money and, in the end, the bill must pass. But it's always an opportunity to talk about some of the things that are and are not in the supply bill: that which should be done by the government, that which is being done and that which unfortunately has been bypassed for another year.

All of this takes place in the context of a decline in the revenues that are available in this province and, indeed, in many jurisdictions around the world. But I would suggest that, in this province, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Revenue and people involved in the government process over the last number of years have seen the world through very much rose-coloured glasses.

I can remember standing in this House and asking questions about a whole bunch of things that were impacting the United States and seeking assurances from the minister and seeking assurances from the Premier that Ontario would, in fact, not be impacted or, if we were, what contingency plans, if any, the government had. I remember standing up here and talking about asset-backed commercial paper and what was happening in the United States, with a number of banks and lending institutions losing their shirts and people losing their life's savings and how that was impacting on businesses in the United States and what was going to happen here in Ontario. I remember being assured that, in spite of the fact that we also had asset-backed commercial paper, ours was a much smaller and much more manageable concern than in the United States.

I remember standing in this very House and asking about the mortgage defaults in the United States—literally seeing hundreds of thousands of homes in that country defaulting on the mortgage and whole swaths of cities being turned into ghost towns. I remember coming back on one occasion from Detroit and a conference that Ontario attended of the state Legislatures and talking in this House about Detroit, about Michigan and the number of homes that had been defaulted and seeing whole areas of the downtown core and out into the more affluent

suburbs up for sale, and houses that were empty and no one was there, and, "How was that going to impact upon the province of Ontario?" and being assured that there would be no impact at all.

I remember standing up and talking about the \$1 trillion of deficit that the United States government was running and the inability that they may have in the future to buy goods and services produced in Ontario and being assured that that was okay.

I remember standing up and talking about Lehman Brothers and some of the other financial institutions as they, one by one, failed, and what impact, if any, that would have in Ontario and being assured again that that would not have much effect.

The combined, cumulative effect of all of those has brought Ontario to the brink as well, and it isn't that our financial institutions are not successful, because we probably have the most successful financial institutions left in the world. We have not had to bail out any of the Big Six sisters. We have not had to bail out the insurance companies. We've not had to spend billions and trillions of dollars like they have in the United States in order to try to keep the market going, although we are in the process, I would suggest, of giving some monies to the Detroit Three.

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In any event, all of these questions were asked and the government continued to say that everything was going along swimmingly. But now the government admits that it is not going along swimmingly, and we now have a budget proposed and a supply requesting a great deal of money and suggesting that we're going to be running deficits probably for the next seven years. I'm not sure that this was totally sound financial management. It is trite to say that no one could have seen what was happening here in Ontario or what was likely to happen in Ontario even a year or two years ago, but I think, with some prudence, the government opposite should have been looking at some of the warning signals coming out from our largest trading partner to the south and understanding that this was going to have a huge impact on the province of Ontario—and to prepare for it. We have not.

When I look at these budget numbers and the supply that is being requested, the same thing is true. The forecast deficit of \$18 billion for this year and next may be very small in comparison to what is actually going to happen. I hope it's not. I hope that we've turned the corner, but every day when I watch the financial markets, including last week when we eked out a very small gain of about 1%, it seems to me that we may not have yet reached the bottom. Every day, when you open up the newspapers, you see another 100 or 200 or 500 or 1,000 jobs lost in various corners of this province, jobs that may have difficulty coming back.

This government has answered that the key to all of this is a wonderful new tool they've discovered, a tool of harmonization; a tool that I must say members of the finance committee have talked about for the past seven years. Every single time, while the Liberals were in

power, for five of those years at least, or six now, the harmonization topic got very short shrift because that was not on the government agenda and it's not what they intended to do. The arguments that were constantly being made are the same arguments that are being made on this side of the House back to the government today: that whenever there is a harmonization that takes place, the people who invariably lose are the consumers. It is with the consumers, I think, this ultimately will rest. Whether they buy what this government is attempting to do or whether they do not, we'll certainly rise and be heard most strenuously a year this July when the harmonization takes effect.

The harmonization, though, does have winners and losers. The big winners will, of course, be the corporations, the businesses, those that will see their taxes decline hugely, those that will see their operating costs decline hugely, and the big losers at this point appear to be ordinary consumers, ordinary people. They will have to pay more for such things as gas, oil, electricity; they'll have to pay more for food; they'll have to pay more for fast food and restaurant bills of under \$4; they'll have to pay more for lawyers and legal fees, and a whole broad range of extra costs that are going to have to be borne by them. The reality is that all of this will raise costs to ordinary consumers, and the reality is that there will be huge reductions concomitantly with the corporations.

We are debating the supply bill. This supply bill is requesting from this House the authority to raise an enormous amount of money. In short, the supply bill is asking for \$87,474,349,400 for public services. The supply bill at the same time is also asking for \$2,610,818,500 for capital and assets. That is almost the total expenditure of this government—minus, of course, the deficit that is going to be run—and it is requesting permission of this House to do it. If this House were to deny that, of course, an election would ensue immediately because a loss of this bill would also mean the government would be forced to resign. I do not believe that is going to happen, given the numbers in this House and the numbers on one side versus the numbers on the other, but it is an enormous amount of money for the government to ask this House to do at this time of year, given the circumstances of what is taking place out there in the market.

I had an opportunity as well to see what is contained within the compendium to the supply bill. Some of it is somewhat disturbing to me. First is section 22 of the compendium, which is the Ontario Loan Act. It is asking that the government be given, as well as the expenditure of some \$90 billion of the people's money, authority to raise an additional \$23.5 billion in loans. I assume the government might need the money. I don't know where the figure came from because it is not explained other than that that is the amount of money the government wants to borrow from the public, either in Canada or abroad, from ordinary individuals, corporations or whoever else might loan it to them, perhaps other governments. As well, they want the authority to borrow \$10

billion on smart-terms securities—that that money can be repaid back over a 25-year term. That is a total of \$33.5 billion that supply is asking the government to be given, I would assume in part to pay the deficits that are forthcoming.

What troubles me is that that total runs some \$33 billion, and the deficits are supposedly confined to some \$18 billion. There is \$15 billion here that is unaccounted for, and I don't know why the government wants to borrow it, save and except if they're borrowing it at a lower cost so that they can pay off higher old loans. That may be something that is of value, but I'm not sure that that's what it is. It has not been explained at all by the government.

I looked as well into section 24 of the compendium, which is the Pension Benefits Act. It says quite clearly of section 82—and this I found very intriguing. We know that many of the pensions in Ontario, many of the pensions in Canada, are under some kind of financial duress. We know that pensions and pension funds may not be able to pay out when they are required to do so because most of them had invested in what they thought were fairly secure stocks, bonds and securities, only to find that those stocks, bonds and securities have declined in value by some 40% or 50% since last year. I don't think any of the members of this House, at least not the members who have invested in stocks, bonds and securities through their own pension plans through this House—they would all recognize that the stock market has collapsed to such an extent that the value of the shares that ordinary people own have declined by 40% on average across the whole length and breadth. So it's not surprising that the pension funds have declined as well. I looked at section 24, and I invite all the members to look at what I think is a kind of strange piece of legislation. Section 24 of the compendium, relating to section 82 of the Pension Benefits Act, says that the cabinet will be given the authority—the Lieutenant Governor in Council will be given the authority to ask the finance minister to make loans to the pension benefits guarantee fund. That is, if the fund requires additional money so that some of these pensions can be topped up so that the pensions in turn are payable to ordinary citizens who have invested most of their life and most of their work in various factories and jobs across the province for a long, long time, this is the authority to do that. Unfortunately that same compendium, that same section, limits the payout to \$1,000.

That was established 29 years ago, \$1,000 as the maximum that could be paid out. I want to tell you that \$1,000 in today's market, \$1,000 today, is not the equivalent of what it was 29 years ago. People who find themselves under duress and their pension fund not able to pay can seek only the security that maybe the government, in paying into this, will make \$1,000 available to them. That is very short comfort to anyone looking to this.

But the real kicker here, and I invite all the members opposite to look also at section 24 of the compendium, is

that in section 82 nothing at all is required of the minister. He or she does not ever have to do what the cabinet asks. Nothing in law will require the minister to pay into this fund, so that if it starts to go broke, the law says that, notwithstanding that the Lieutenant Governor in Council can request it, the minister is under no obligation to do it. That's also what you're asking us to pass here today. I find this a little strange.

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I went on to read some of the others. There are some really interesting things in here. The next one was the Taxation Act. The Taxation Act has been modified in a very strange way when it comes to the political process and to donations to political parties, political individuals and political causes. We all know in this province that individuals, corporations and unions can donate to political causes, political parties, political things that they believe in. We know that there is a regimen within the tax system such that, when you donate to a political party, there is a certain amount of money that comes back: 75% on the first \$400, 50% on the next amount and 33% on the remaining amount. People are very aware of that under the Income Tax Act, especially this time of the year when people are filling in their income tax. But what is strange here and what I uncovered here under the Taxation Act is that corporations are going to be given a benefit never before given to anyone else, not to corporations, unions or individuals, and that is that they are going to be given a non-refundable tax credit for 20 years, and it's going to be retroactive. So if the corporation did not make any payments, did not support a political party or a candidate or a cause that fell under the act, they are now going to be able to do so retroactively for 20 years.

What is this? I don't understand what this is. Has the government made some kind of deal with the corporations? "You've not given us money in the past, but you can now give 20 years all at once and get a tax rebate for it?" I know individuals would stand up and say, "Jeez, I never had any money 17 or 18 years ago, but I now have won the lottery and I'd like to give some money to my favourite political party." They won't be allowed to do this. I know the unions won't be allowed to do this, but I see the corporations are, and I don't know what's in the government's head. I don't know what made you want to do this. I don't know why it's in the supply. If you can tell me why you've done this, then please, somebody on the other side, stand up and tell me why you're giving the corporations the authority to go back 20 years to make political contributions. To whom are they going to make those contributions? Not likely to us in the NDP, but I would suggest very likely to the government.

And there it is: That's what you put in your own Supply Act. That's what you stand here and try to do under the guise that we need the money. Well, perhaps we need to discuss this a little more; perhaps somebody will. Perhaps when we're trying to look at how to change the regulations around here relating to the political process, this will be brought up.

Sadly—and I'd like to conclude with this—I've been waiting for the Supply Act, for the compendium, to finally try to do something about co-ops, the co-operative movement here in this province. We know that the co-operative movement is an alternative to the corporations. We know that the co-operative moment has been very successful in particularly two provinces, Saskatchewan and Quebec, where co-operatives are given government resources, where co-operatives are allowed to do business and where they have been very successful in giving an alternative to corporations and very successful in giving ordinary people the authority to band together in order to sell their goods and products.

Back in 2006, the then-member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot, who is now the Minister of Government Services, Mr. McMeekin, stood in this House in private members' business and passed resolution number 33 to ask the government to set up a co-operative secretariat. I believe it passed unanimously on that day, from the members who were present. Of course, it was not binding on the government, but notwithstanding, a lot of things have happened in the years since 2006. In 2007, the co-operative movement met with 16 MPPs over the period of that year to try to push the idea of the co-operative secretariat. They met with the Ministry of Economic Development on numerous occasions to talk about the secretariat and what could happen. Nothing happened in 2007. Not to be deterred, in 2008, they came back. They had seven meetings with members of this Legislature. They met with the Ministry of Economic Development's chief of staff and with ministry officials on numerous occasions, and they met with Mr. McMeekin, who had been the author of the bill and by this time was a minister, and asked him to facilitate. He promised to facilitate a meeting with economic development and with finance to try to get this moving. In 2009, to date, there have been 11 meetings.

Overall, what the co-operative movement is asking for, and what could have been and should have been put in this compendium at long last, is an opportunity to facilitate the ability of co-ops to attract investment. They are seeking nothing more than an opportunity to obtain venture capital in the same way as corporations can do. They are seeking nothing more than an opportunity to get equity funds in the same way that corporations can do. They are looking for capital funds and the ability to obtain capital so that they too can expand in these difficult times, because co-operatives can—and do in places like Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan—produce as many jobs as corporations, and when the corporations are failing, perhaps the co-ops should be given the same opportunity. So they're looking for capital funds.

Last but not least, they're looking for community power funds, because co-operatives such as Bullfrog Power can produce green energy and want to get into this game as well.

But there is nothing in this Supply Act and there is nothing in the compendium to change how the co-operative movement might do so. There's lots of stuff for

corporations. There's \$4 billion in tax cuts. There's the authority to go back 20 years to make political contributions. But for co-operatives we see nothing.

I know the government needs the \$90 billion. I know the government would grind to a halt, the workers couldn't be paid—I know that the money is needed for capital and the money is needed to have the whole experience of government continue in the province of Ontario. But surely this was an opportunity for this government to do something that was just. This was an opportunity for this government, in trying times—even though they've just discovered it—to do what was right: to do what was right in terms of not requiring the loans; to do what was right for the Pension Benefits Act; to do what was right to be fair to all of those who contribute to political parties; and most assuredly to do what was right for the co-op movement, which has been waiting patiently for three or four years following Mr. McMeekin's private member's bill to actually have this government take some form of action, and until this point to no avail.

So that's what I would like to discuss in terms of this. I would leave the remaining amount of time to my colleague the member from Kenora—Rainy River. I'm used to calling him the leader of the third party. I'm sure he has much more insight on this bill as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I want to thank my colleague from Beaches—East York for an enlightening conversation, and I want to pick up where he left off.

The supply bill is an opportunity to look at how the government of the day is responding to what is happening in Ontario today. I think everyone across this province understands that there are some very troubling things happening in Ontario. Close to 400,000 good manufacturing jobs have been destroyed in this province in the last couple of years. Ontario is now losing 30,000 jobs a month, which works out to 360,000 jobs a year.

Community after community—go to Cornwall, Oshawa, Oakville, St. Catharines, Welland, Thorold, Hamilton, Brantford, Cambridge, Kitchener, London, Sarnia, Chatham, Windsor, Kenora, Dryden, Thunder Bay, Nipigon, Red Rock, Marathon, Terrace Bay, Geraldton, Longlac, Chapleau, Wawa, Sault Ste. Marie, Smooth Rock Falls, Hearst, Kapuskasing, Cochrane, and the list goes on. In community after community after community, people who have worked hard all their lives, people who have paid their taxes, people who have raised their children, contributed to the community, done everything that we would ask responsible people to do, are losing their jobs in droves.

1510

One would think that a government that cared about people would actually respond to this devastating loss of good jobs in the province. In fact, over the last six months, the last year, many of us have been looking for some kind of response from this government.

We've heard lots of speeches from the Premier saying everything's going to be fine, everything's going to be

wonderful, and there's no problem here. I remember the Premier saying there was no problem when tens of thousands of workers in the forest sector were losing their jobs. I remember the Premier saying there was no problem when General Motors announced, after receiving \$200 million from the McGuinty government, that they were now going to close the truck plant in Oshawa and move production to Mexico.

The Stelco steel plant in Hamilton continued to produce during the Great Depression in the 1930s. It continued to produce during the very devastating recession of 1981, 1982 and 1983. It continued to produce during the very difficult recession of 1990, 1991 and 1992. It is closed today, and all of the workers are out on the street.

This is indeed a crisis. In fact, I think it is fair to say that Ontario is becoming a much poorer province very, very quickly. The McGuinty government may choose to ignore the reality, but the reality is this: Once you get outside the so-called financial district of Toronto, the heart and soul of Ontario's economy is manufacturing. It is the single thing that has allowed Ontario to function as a community, as a province. It is the single thing that has provided good jobs for people. It is the single greatest contributor in terms of making sure that people can pay their taxes and live together in some sense of a strong and good community. Today, that manufacturing economy is being hurt in literally dozens of ways, and we have yet to hear a thoughtful response from this government.

Now, we hear rhetorical speeches from time to time. The Premier likes to wax on about the new economy. I've never heard the new economy defined, but the Premier and some of the cabinet ministers like to wax on about a so-called new economy. They even commissioned Richard Florida, a professor at the University of Toronto—imagine this—paying in excess of \$2 million for a report. I found that he indulged in the same rhetorical speech-making when he produced his report here at the Queen's Park press gallery, but one of the journalists—in fact, sad to say, one of the journalists who may soon be unemployed himself—had the temerity to ask Professor Florida, what should laid-off auto workers, steelworkers and forest workers do, what should laid-off workers do, according to Richard Florida, after he'd written this \$2-million report. Do you know what his response was? His response was, "Well, maybe they should be creative and open an art gallery."

I ask, is this the McGuinty government's vision of a new economy? Workers who have contributed so much to Ontario's economy and so much to Ontario society, who are now losing their jobs in manufacturing, are told by the spokesperson for the McGuinty government, "Be creative. Open an art gallery"? Is this the new economy? I don't think so, and it's nothing of an economic vision.

But as we watch more and more communities become poorer by the day, as we watch the announcement of 500 workers there, 1,000 workers somewhere else, 2,100 workers at Stelco-United Steel in Hamilton, I think people want to hear from this government. What's its

direction? What's its plan? What does it have in mind? Certainly, I would hope, not telling people, "Just go open an art gallery."

We have searched in vain and we've even made suggestions. We've suggested that there needs to be a buy-Ontario policy. Everyone knows that any society that is urban or suburban is going to have to make major investments in rapid transit and urban transit. It just doesn't make sense to have literally millions of cars on the highway stacked up one behind the other from 7 in the morning until 10 in the morning and then stacked up again from 3 in the afternoon till 7 o'clock at night. It doesn't make any sense. If you're going to live in an urban and suburban society, you have to make major investments in urban transit. And if Ontario is going to spend billions of dollars on urban transit, shouldn't we put in place a template that says that some of those jobs have to be here in Ontario? But this government refuses.

The United States has a buy-America policy. If Chicago or New York or Miami or Los Angeles or New Orleans—any municipality in the United States—is going to purchase subway cars, light-rail cars, streetcars or buses for their urban or suburban transit system and there's even one penny of federal government money in that contract, then 50% of the work has to be done in the United States, along with the final assembly. You know what that has done for the United States? It has ensured that literally hundreds of thousands of good, skilled jobs happen in the United States. And it's a simple formula. The Americans are simply saying: "Do you want access to our market? Do you want access to our government funds for light rail, for subway, for streetcars, for buses? Then you have to invest in the United States and you have to provide some jobs here."

It was striking the other day that the new Vice-President, Joe Biden, goes to St. Cloud, Minnesota, and what is he going to do? As part of their urban transit vision he's visiting the plant of New Flyer bus manufacturers. New Flyer happens to manufacture 40% of the transit buses that are used in North America; 40% of all the transit buses used in North America are manufactured by New Flyer. So he goes to the plant in St. Cloud, Minnesota, and there are electricians, there are welders, there are instrument mechanics, there are air-conditioning experts—every kind of trade you could imagine; thousands of them working in this plant. Do you know what? New Flyer is a Canadian company. They're headquartered in Winnipeg. They manufacture the bus shells in Winnipeg. But because of the buy-America policy, the bus shells go from Winnipeg down to St. Cloud, Minnesota, where the final assembly happens. Why? Because that's the buy-America policy in the United States. They don't care if you're a company from Japan, if you're a company from Germany, if you're a company from Brazil or if you're a company from Canada; if you want to produce rapid transit vehicles for American municipalities, then the buy-America policy says that you establish a plant in the United States and you create some jobs in the United States.

I tell you, if you look across the United States, whether it be subways—Bombardier has a plant in Montreal and a finishing plant in Plattsburgh, New York; New Flyer bus lines; Motor Coach Industries, another company in Winnipeg, has a plant immediately south of the border to do the finishing work. Plant after plant—Orion Bus here in Ontario has a plant in New York state where they do the finishing work on buses sold in the United States. The buy-America policy literally helps to sustain hundreds of thousands of jobs in the United States. It's a simple concept. If you want access to the American market, if you want access to the money of taxpayers in the United States, then you have to invest in the United States and you have to provide jobs in the United States.

We've been advocating this for the McGuinty government now for, gee, over four years. We continue to look for some response from the McGuinty government. We have had press releases where the McGuinty government boasts about the \$200 million they gave to General Motors. General Motors said, "Thanks for the money," and moved the jobs to Mexico. We've heard boasts from the McGuinty government about how they were happy to give money to Chrysler—almost \$100 million. Now we see Chrysler saying, "Hey, we may move everything to St. Louis and Michigan."

1520

Where is this government's job strategy? Where is this government's concept, vision, plan to respond to the most pressing issue in Ontario today? Hundreds of thousands of good people are losing their jobs, and the McGuinty government wants to pretend that everything is fine and everything is wonderful. It's not fine, because here's what has happened: People who have worked hard all their lives, people who have paid the taxes, people who have looked after their kids, people who have contributed to the community, have now lost their jobs, in many cases their employment insurance has expired, and they're looking for help. And you know what they're being told? They're being told, "You have to exhaust your assets before you could even apply for social assistance in Ontario. You have to exhaust your bank account. You have to exhaust your RRSPs. By the way, the car you are driving is too new. You have to sell it and get an older one or have no vehicle whatsoever."

I was intrigued. Over the past couple of months I've had an opportunity to go to communities where people lost their jobs two or three years ago in the forest sector. Do you know what is happening now? People are having their electricity shut off because they do not have enough monthly income even to pay the hydro bill. Last I checked in some of these communities—it was 17 below last night. How are people supposed to live, having their electricity shut off? How do you cook your food? How can you rely upon the food in your deep freeze to be safe and healthy to eat? In many communities, this is reaching crisis proportion. And yet people are asking, "Where is this government's plan? Where is this government's strategy?"

Now, we just had a budget last week. That was revealing. I'm not going to talk a lot about that, but it was revealing, because it was almost as if I heard Mike Harris repeating himself. I remember when Mike Harris stood over there where Dalton McGuinty now stands, and his message for six and a half years was, "If you cut corporate taxes and cut corporate taxes and cut corporate taxes, it will lead Ontario to the promised land, and we'll have an abundant economy." Well, they cut corporate taxes, they cut corporate taxes, they cut corporate taxes, and as the McGuinty Liberals are fond of pointing out, they left Ontario with a big deficit.

Then there's some guy named George Bush who just exited the stage. For eight years George Bush said, "Cut corporate taxes, cut taxes on the well-off, cut corporate taxes, cut corporate taxes, and they will deliver the United States to the promised land." I ask you, Speaker, to go anywhere in the United States and ask them if they're living in the promised land. I think they'll tell you that it's a very bad fairy tale where literally millions of people are being hurt.

We've had Stephen Harper say, "Cut corporate tax, cut corporate taxes, cut corporate taxes, and it will lead us to the promised land." I don't know about you, but the federal government is looking at a pretty hefty budget deficit as well.

But I couldn't believe my ears when I heard the McGuinty government last week come out and say, "If we cut corporate taxes, cut corporate taxes, and cut corporate taxes, it will lead us to the promised land." How many times do we have to watch a rerun of this bad movie and realize that it doesn't lead to the promised land? It's leading us into some very, very desperate situations for people.

You know, in all of this effort to cut taxes, to deregulate, the most outstanding thing to me is, I watch what has happened financially in the United States, and there was a piece last week that disclosed the billions of dollars that some of the operators of these hedge funds have made off with—the billions of dollars. Meanwhile, ordinary people are out of work, other people are faced with losing their jobs, and people are losing their homes.

I say again, is this the promised land? Is this the promised land? And we know now that many of these people who operated these hedge funds were far, far beyond the law, far beyond any sense of common decency, far beyond any sense of the rules in a civilized society, yet what do we hear from the McGuinty government? "Cut corporate taxes, cut corporate taxes, cut corporate taxes, and it will deliver us to the promised land." I guess maybe Mike Harris won after all, because that certainly seems to be where this is headed.

I look at what is happening: People are losing their jobs, people are being forced to live on smaller and smaller incomes, yet what's going to be the major change of this budget? People who are not working or are working but having to live on lower incomes are going to pay more taxes—8% more when you put the GST and PST together. So people who have less money are going to

pay more taxes, and what are corporations going to get? All in, it's going to be a corporate tax cut of close to \$3 billion. I ask again, is this the definition of the promised land: people who don't have money pay more, and corporations pay less? I don't think so.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Further debate? Does any other member wish to speak?

Mr. Duguid has moved second reading of Bill 161. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 64, this bill is moved immediately for third reading.

SUPPLY ACT, 2009

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2009

Mr. Duguid, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 161, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009 / *Projet de loi 161, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2009.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Duguid has moved third reading of Bill 161. Pursuant to standing order 64, I am now required to put the question.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be named as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Orders of the day. Deputy government House leader?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I believe we have unanimous consent to recess the House for a few minutes until 3:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Do we have unanimous consent to recess the House until 3:30? Agreed?

This House will stand recessed until 3:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1528 to 1534.

2009 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 26, 2009, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate? The leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and at the outset I want to thank you for your consideration with respect to the challenges we face around this place and your patience as well, sir.

I'm rising today to respond to the budget motion on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus. I'd like to begin my remarks with a simple question: What's the definition of a recession? Economists have their definition, but for people across this province struggling to keep their heads above the current financial challenges, I would suggest a recession is when your neighbour loses their job.

A lot of our neighbours have been losing their jobs since the Liberals took office. In fact, nearly 300,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in this province since mid-2004. Another 135,000 manufacturing jobs are expected to be lost this year. We've seen over 100,000 disappear in just the past two months. That's what happens when you raise taxes. Tax hikes kill jobs.

The last time we sat in opposition across from a government that raised taxes, Ontario had a recession. Our neighbours all across Ontario lost their jobs. To my neighbours across this chamber, specifically Liberal backbenchers: I ask, what have you done for your neighbours? What have you done to save your neighbours' jobs, your constituents' jobs? Did you stand up to your leader when he came to you with the idea of raising taxes in the middle of a recession? Did he seek your advice? And if you stood up in caucus on behalf of your neighbours, your constituents, how come you didn't stand a little taller, speak out a little louder and stop this punishing tax hike before it hit your neighbours?

As a Progressive Conservative, I don't find too many opportunities to quote the Toronto Star, but this is one of those rare occasions. In Jim Coyle's column today, he references what he describes as Dalton McGuinty's "increasingly arrogant and autocratic attitude." That's a view I suspect is shared not just by opposition members but government backbenchers as well. If only they could muster some steel in their spines, they might start standing up and speaking out against a Premier who, to use Jim Coyle's words, was "less than forthcoming" during Liberal caucus discussions on the harmonized sales tax. In my less polite words, Mr. McGuinty blindsided his own caucus, didn't let them know that he had already decided to bring in a massive tax-grab budget that will do serious harm to many of their constituents.

Of course, we're not hearing any uproar from the Liberal backbenchers. They are here for one reason and one reason only: to do Mr. McGuinty's bidding—stand up when they're told to stand up, sit down when they're told to sit down, speak when they're told to speak. That's the sad state of parliamentary democracy in today's Legislature.

The challenges this budget will create for Ontarians already coping with the worst recession in 70 years should be the number one priority for MPPs: Look after and represent the people in your riding, the people who elected you. Regrettably, that number one priority for

Liberal MPPs isn't even on their list. They're here to support their leader; no other priority permitted. Over the course of this debate they will dutifully, obediently stand in their place and read words written by people in the Premier's office and hope that no one in their riding will notice their abject failure to represent them.

I said we've seen this kind of thing before—tax hikes, recession, our neighbours losing their jobs—but perhaps I was a little wrong on that. We haven't seen anything quite like this before: not just a tax hike in the middle of a recession but on top of it, the largest deficit in Ontario's history; worse still, have-not status for the first time in our lives, meaning that Ontario will start accepting a handout from the federal government and will step into the cycle of potential welfare dependency on the federal government starting April 1. This week, this Wednesday, we become a have-not province.

This is not an ordinary budget. It's not an ordinary Liberal budget. It's even worse than the worst budget the NDP foisted on this province. Again back, surprisingly, to the Toronto Star: "\$14.1 Billion Deficit is Largest in the History of Ontario." The "big-spending budget ... will make everyone's wallet ... lighter ... eclipsed the long-held red ink record held by former NDP Treasurer Floyd Laughren...." That's the Toronto Star. Toronto Star reporter Richard Brennan even asked the finance minister on Thursday, Minister, you "mind if I call you Floyd?"

1540

The Premier is raising taxes on homes in the middle of a housing crisis. Here's what Pauline Aunger, the president of the Ontario Real Estate Association, had to say about that on Thursday in a Canadian Press story: "These additional taxes could price some homebuyers, especially first-time homebuyers, right out of the market." Ms. Aunger's association represents the province's 47,000 real estate brokers. She knows what she's talking about.

The Premier is also raising taxes on gas while fuel prices are in flux. He's punishing lower- and middle-class Ontarians the most by slapping taxes on things like restaurant food, Internet service, home heating oil, entertainment, even on a cup of Tim Hortons coffee. It's nothing short of a war on Ontario families, a war on Ontario workers and a war on the middle class at exactly the wrong time. The National Post described it as "a massive tax grab" that "could easily provoke a consumer revolt ... the last thing Ontario needs."

Even those who agree with harmonizing the provincial sales tax and the GST say that this is precisely the wrong time to do it. Again, I'll quote the National Post: "While introducing a new form of sales tax may be justified on paper, doing so at the depth of a recession, when working families are already nervous, could easily spook consumers, causing them to postpone purchases—particularly big-ticket items such as cars—thereby worsening the current" economic "downturn in Ontario."

Do we really want more Ontarians postponing big-ticket purchases like cars and homes? Aren't Ontario's auto industry and housing industry suffering enough? Do

we really want Ontarians postponing even small-ticket purchases or making fewer of them, maybe cutting back a cup of Tim Hortons coffee here and there? Is that what we really want? Is this the right time for a tax on Tim Hortons? The Tim Hortons tax; well, I say good luck in selling that to the people of Ontario.

Is this the right time for a tax hike on the average family? A quote from just one, Mia Lalonde, on CBC's The National on March 26: "Times are really tough for the average family and the average consumer, and it just seems like it's a hit in the pocket." Well, Mia is right. It's a hit; it's a big hit in the pocket for the average family and the average consumer.

Mr. McGuinty's insatiable appetite for spending has already emptied out our back pockets. Now he's hitting our front pockets, and apparently he won't stop until there's nothing left but lint. The Premier can dress it up however he wants, but the truth is loud and clear to the average Ontario taxpayer.

I want to say a few words to our Ontario neighbours who still have jobs. Perhaps you commute to work, like so many Ontarians do. This Premier wants to raise their taxes with a whopping 8% tax hike on gas, making it more expensive for people to drive to work, drive to the grocery store or pick up the kids at school. Some of us, as I mentioned in question period today, are old enough to remember when gas was measured in gallons, and some of us remember another politician who raised taxes on gas. Back then it was Joe Clark raising taxes 18 cents a gallon. The Premier's new tax hike on gas isn't 18 cents a gallon, it's not 20 cents a gallon, and it's not even 25 cents a gallon. The Premier's new tax hike on gas, on commuters, on mothers, on fathers picking up kids at school is a whopping 32 cents a gallon based on current prices. That gives people an idea of the magnitude of this tax grab. Prices, we know, in terms of gasoline, will rise in the future. It's also a tax on a tax.

Mr. Clark's government was defeated on the basis of that tax hike, a fate that awaits Mr. McGuinty and his supporters.

And if you think you'll be able to escape this mess by taking another mode of transportation, well, Dalton's got that taxed too. You'll be hit with a tax on your plane ticket, on your train ticket, on your bus ticket, on your taxi fare. The single sales tax will also mean a tax on electricity, a tax on cellphones, a tax on cable, a tax on a ski lift ticket. Every time they need an electrician, a plumber, a carpenter, a furnace repaired, air conditioning service, their driveway shovelled and their lawn cut, Ontarians have to be prepared to add the 8% tax, a tax they didn't pay before Mr. Dalton McGuinty's latest tax grab was announced.

Even going out on the town, after working hard all week, won't be as much fun. You're going to be taxed on that restaurant food. Stephanie Jones from the Ontario restaurant operators' association, after the budget, described the initiative impacting their industry as "death by a thousand cuts."

Going out of town won't have as much appeal any more either. Hotel rooms will be taxed too.

Dalton's hit list of items to be taxed is endless. "Not even audio books for the blind escaped the taxman yesterday," according to the March 27 edition of the Kingston Whig-Standard.

Even legal services will be taxed. This is Jamie Trimble of the Ontario Bar Association, quoted in the Toronto Star, on legal services: "It means ordinary folk who, for instance, are being denied access to their children, are going to have that much more difficulty." That's from the Ontario Bar Association.

So I say once again to the backbench Liberals across the way, start standing up for your constituents. Stand up for what's right. Stand up for your neighbours who are losing their jobs. For those watching, viewing these proceedings, who live in Liberal ridings, I would encourage you to contact your local MPP to ask why he or she has remained silent on this tax grab budget. Viewers can call our 1-800 number—that's 1-800-263-2335—to let us know how this new tax is impacting you, your families, your businesses. We also intend to launch a related website, and we'll have details of that website announced very shortly.

The Premier is trying to coddle our neighbours, buy them off with their own money, returning \$1,000 in three instalments after he's already removed it from their pockets. Perhaps the Premier said to caucus, "Here's an idea. Let's send out three cheques to people to make them forget about the tax hike, a tax hike that will be with them forever." Well, that's cynical enough, but even more cynical is the Premier's scheme to send one of those cheques out just before Christmas. It's an insult to the intelligence of Ontarians. It's really a triple bribe, the scheme to send three "McGuilty" cheques to taxpayers. The first cheque is hush money to keep people quiet about being gouged. The second cheque is the Christmas cheque just to remind people that, yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus, even after the McGuinty Liberals have taxed them to their teeth. The last cheque, which coincidentally will arrive in people's mailboxes in June 2011, is an attempt, in our view—I think most Ontarians will share this view—to buy their votes for the October 2011 election.

We in the Progressive Conservative Party are on to you, Mr. Premier. So are Ontarians. You're like the magician who has tried to fool people using the old sleight-of-hand method, hoping people won't notice how you accomplish the trick. Well, Premier, you are soon going to learn that you have a big political problem with this attempted magic trick. People will only see these cheques once, twice, maybe three times, spaced out over two years and then, presto, they'll be gone. Meanwhile, the Premier's new tax hikes will be in our face every single day, at the gas station, at the restaurant, at the train station, at the airport, at the bus station, in taxicabs, on our cellphone bills, on our cable bills, on our Internet bills, at hotels, at the funeral parlour, in apartment buildings, in our homes and at the counter at Tim Hortons—a constant, never-ending reminder of the worst budget in Ontario's history. I say the people of Ontario will not forget.

1550

This is the wrong budget at the wrong time, and it gets worse. This budget plans to put Ontario in the hole and keep us there for at least another seven years—seven years of deficits by design. Think about that: a plan to put Ontario in the hole for seven years. That's their plan. It's a perfectly crafted plan for failure.

One of the central assumptions of their budget is that the recession will end by mid-year this year. That's 90 days from now. Is that optimistic, foolish fantasy or something else? I don't know. Let's get together in 90 days and see if the recession is over. I think we all hope it is, and if the recession is over in 90 days, as this budget contends, we will still be left with seven years of deficits—a recession that's less than one year long from beginning to end leading to seven years of deficits. It's a 7-1 ratio. It's like dog years. For every one year of recession the Premier turns it into seven years of deficits. Can you imagine spending \$1 and going \$7 into debt? Well, you don't have to imagine it anymore. This budget makes it a reality for you, your children and your grandchildren.

What if the recession doesn't end 90 days from now? What if it lasts longer? What if the recession lasts until July? Does that mean Ontario will run a deficit for eight years? What if the recession lasts until the end of this year? Deficits for nine, 10, 11 years? Dog days, indeed, from Mr. McGuinty.

Let me remind you once again, this is by design, their design. It's their budget, and if it all goes according to their plan, Ontario families will see tax hikes on homes while the housing market is already in enough trouble, tax hikes on gas while our auto industry is in crisis, tax hikes on transportation while people need to get to work more than ever to pay those taxes, and even taxes on legal services while people are already having a hard time accessing the justice system in this province, and seven years of planned deficits which will weigh heavily—heavily indeed—on the next generation.

A lot has been made about the Premier finally—albeit lately, but finally—admitting that he needs to lower, not raise, taxes on business if he wants to have business continue to operate in this province. I have to say—and this was noted on Global TV this week as well—that none of the cuts will take effect for more than a year, too late for many of the companies struggling to make it through this recessionary period. Still, the Premier did finally admit that he was wrong on business taxes and that we were right on business taxes. I'm glad we were able to help him see the light. However, just as the Premier giveth to small business with one hand, he taketh away with the other—just like the old magic trick I mentioned earlier.

I received an e-mail last night from a small business owner. He wrote to me about the Liberals' triple whammy on small business. He informed me that the tax on heat and hydro alone, because of this new single sales tax, will hike up his costs by an additional \$10,000. That's the impact on his bottom line.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: It passes that through, and you know it.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Well, that's certainly what I'm hearing and what we are hearing from many small business people across this province.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And what does the homeowner do, Mike?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Ontarians are starting to see who's really behind the curtain in Dalton McGuinty's office. It's a man who has sadly lost touch with the people and with economic reality since becoming Premier. He's a man who is living in a comfortable bubble. He's shielded from society in his taxpayer-subsidized, million-dollar-plus home in a very tony Toronto neighbourhood. He is picked up by a taxpayer-paid-for, chauffeur-driven limousine in the morning. He comes into an office where he has a record number of staffers in the Premier's office responding to him, paid for by the taxpayers of this province.

A couple of years ago—this was two or three years ago—we heard stories about the Premier paying \$50, \$60, \$70 for a haircut. You know, in stark contrast, I get my ears lowered in my riding at Jay's Barber Shop on King Street East in Brockville. Jay Lindy, a great guy: For \$7.50, I get a haircut, a briefing on the political scene plus three or four jokes I can't repeat here.

The Premier, stuck in his bubble, regrettably doesn't understand and appreciate the impact of his latest tax burden on hard-working families, small businessmen, the unemployed, seniors and others on fixed income. How many communities has he visited over the past few years that have lost major manufacturing operations, with hundreds and thousands of people thrown out of work? How many of those communities has he visited?

Mr. Tim Hudak: None.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: None; none that we're aware of.

He's a man who just can't stop himself from making promises as well about no more taxes, then breaking them over and over and over again. He's publicly broken the promise to not raise taxes so many times that we have classified him, and many others have as well, as a serial promise breaker, a repeat offender. He's proven that he can't be rehabilitated. He can't be rehabilitated because he just can't stop himself from raising taxes.

The Premier keeps reoffending—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My colleague just mentioned something: because he believes he can get away with it. In his view, he can get away with it. Even the Windsor Star—and this is in Finance Minister Duncan's riding, his home paper. Here is what was mentioned in the Star's editorial on March 27: "To some degree, the Liberals' attitude toward taxpayers stems from the fact they promised not to raise taxes in the 2003 election campaign, and then hit Ontarians with a health tax of up to \$900 a person. It didn't hurt them at the polls at all in 2007. They made the same 'no new taxes' vow in that

election and, as of Thursday, they've broken their promise again." The Windsor Star says, "This time, we think Ontarians are paying attention." We agree.

The Premier's bad behaviour of promise-breaking on tax increases was rewarded with re-election in 2007. It's a grave insult to the intelligence of voters across this great province for the Premier to think he can get away with it again in 2011. As the saying goes, once burned, twice shy.

I guess we could also describe the Premier as a serial spender. It's that behaviour, spending like there's no tomorrow, that helped get us into this mess in the first place. Over the past six years, the McGuinty Liberals forked out \$27 billion and increased government spending by 40%. They have spent over budget every year since they were elected, when they should have been storing their acorns in anticipation of tough times ahead.

The signs were all there. Our party saw them; many, many economists saw them. Almost four years ago, we introduced a motion for debate in the Legislature calling for the McGuinty Liberals to immediately bring forward a detailed government initiative to deal with economic crises affecting communities like Cornwall, Oshawa, Collingwood, Thunder Bay, Windsor, St. Catharines and a host of smaller communities around Ontario. The Liberal members supported our idea but then did nothing, perhaps hoping we'd forget to out them for their inaction.

Our party tried again in May 2007 with another jobs-related motion. It was also debated in this place, and this time, when we asked the McGuinty Liberals to bring forward a comprehensive jobs plan, they flatly voted us down.

1600

But we didn't give up. We tried again to spur the government into economic action. In the fall of 2008, we asked for a select committee on the Ontario economy to consider and report on options to address the challenges faced by Ontario families and businesses in the province's weakened economy. Once again, the Liberals gave the thumbs-down to this motion as well. Perhaps if the McGuinty Liberals had listened and acted when we first raised the warning flags four years ago, they wouldn't now be faced with a dismal record of nearly 300,000 manufacturing job losses, with 135,000 more predicted to come before the end of this year.

This is an aside: You can compare that to the record when our party left office. In 2003, we had created one million net new jobs.

Leading up to the budget, in an effort to work cooperatively during tough economic times, our party announced two specific ideas that could help both cash-strapped consumers and the struggling auto sector right now. We asked the McGuinty Liberals to implement a three-month provincial sales tax holiday on new car and truck sales immediately. It wasn't in the budget; instead, the Liberals decided to tax gas.

We asked the McGuinty Liberals to include a retire-your-ride program in partnership with a similar federal program. This program would give Ontario drivers \$2,000 towards the purchase or lease of a new car once

they turn in a vehicle that is at least 10 years old. It also would have assisted in terms of improving the environment. This wasn't in the budget either; instead, the Liberals decided to tax train, plane, bus and taxi fares.

In closing, I'd like to remind everyone that it took our party five and a half years to get the Premier to change his tune on lowering taxes for businesses. We should have been more specific, because it's common sense that when you lower taxes on businesses, you don't raise taxes on the things those businesses sell—the things that hard-working Ontario families need. It's common sense that you don't shift the tax burden from businesses to consumers when economic times are at their worst and then expect the businesses to pass on their tax savings to consumers when they're barely keeping their heads above water themselves. Mr. Premier, let me be more specific: Stop raising taxes, period. Stop it. In fact, while I'm at it, cut taxes on businesses and families.

I think we've got it covered, but I think we had it covered the last time we were in office. We cut taxes on businesses and families, we cut the deficit and we brought jobs and prosperity to Ontario. It works every time it's tried.

I'd like to conclude with a twist on an old Ronald Reagan bromide that applies to Ontario's current situation. As I said earlier, the definition of a recession is when your neighbours lose their jobs; the definition of a depression is when you lose your job. The definition of recovery for this great province of ours? The definition of recovery is when this Premier loses his job. The recovery for Ontario begins on October 6, 2011.

At this juncture, I would like to move an amendment. I move that the motion moved by the Minister of Finance on March 26, 2009, "that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government," be amended by deleting the words after "that this House" and adding the following:

"acknowledges that budget 2009 brings in the biggest deficit in Ontario's history of \$14 billion, when the McGuinty Liberals had a \$6-billion surplus just last year; and

"acknowledges that under this government's watch, nearly 300,000 manufacturing jobs have disappeared, with another 135,000 expected to be lost this year; and

"acknowledges that the Premier broke his promise not to raise taxes after the 2003 election by imposing a health tax of up to \$900; and

"acknowledges that the Premier again broke his promise with this budget by announcing his scheme to create a single sales tax, the biggest tax grab in Ontario's history, that will force people to pay taxes on everything from a cup of coffee to funeral services; and

"acknowledges that serial promise-breaking on tax increases, coupled with serial spending and mismanagement of public money, will not be tolerated by the people of Ontario."

Therefore, the government has lost the confidence of this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Runciman has moved the following budget motion amendment:

"I move that the motion moved by the Minister of Finance on March 26, 2009, 'that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government,' be amended by deleting the words after 'that this House' and adding the following:

"“acknowledges that the budget 2009 brings in the biggest deficit in Ontario's history of \$14 billion, when the McGuinty Liberals had a \$6-billion surplus just last year; and

“acknowledges that under this government's watch, nearly 300,000 manufacturing jobs have disappeared, with another 135,000 expected to be lost this year; and

“acknowledges that the Premier broke his promise not to raise taxes after the 2003 election by imposing a health tax of up to \$900; and

“acknowledges that the Premier again broke his promise with this budget by announcing his scheme to

create a single sale tax, the biggest tax grab in Ontario's history, that will force people to pay taxes on everything from a cup of coffee to funeral services; and

“acknowledges that serial promise-breaking on tax increases, coupled with serial spending and mismanagement of public money, will not be tolerated by the people of Ontario.'

"Therefore, the government has lost the confidence of this House."

Further debate?

Debate deemed adjourned.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move adjournment of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried. This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1607.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
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Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
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Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Broten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture
		Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craiton, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
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		Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
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Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
		Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
		Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Johnson, Rick (LIB)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	

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Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener–Conestoga	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of International Trade and Investment / Ministre du Commerce international et de l'Investissement
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
		Deputy Premier / Vice-premier ministre
		Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services / Ministre des Petites Entreprises et des Services aux consommateurs
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Perth–Wellington	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
		Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

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Vic Dhillon, Cheri DiNovo
Helena Jaczek, Shafiq Qaadi
Khalil Ramal, Peter Shurman
Elizabeth Witmer
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Howard Hampton, Greg Sorbara
Norman W. Sterling, David Zimmer
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REPORTS BY COMMITTEES / RAPPORTS DES COMITÉS

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Mr. Norman W. Sterling	5690
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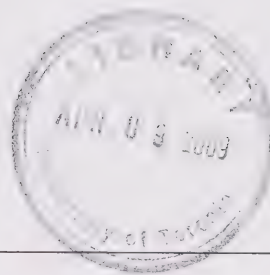
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Mardi 31 mars 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 31 March 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 31 mars 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the Jewish prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREATER TORONTO AND HAMILTON AREA TRANSIT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2009 LOI DE 2009 SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU RÉSEAU DE TRANSPORT EN COMMUN DE LA RÉGION DU GRAND TORONTO ET DE HAMILTON

Mrs. Jeffrey, on behalf of Mr. Bradley, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 163, An Act to amend the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority Act, 2006 / Projet de loi 163, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la Régie des transports du grand Toronto.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I'm sharing my time with the member from London–Fanshawe and the member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

I rise today in the House to begin debate on legislation that, if passed, would merge GO Transit and Metrolinx to build transit faster and ease congestion as well as create jobs.

As the Minister of Transportation stated in the House yesterday, our government is committed to acting decisively and creating a single transit agency. We believe there is an urgency in this province to implement a regional transportation plan to bring projects online faster and more cost-efficiently. The regional transportation plan, appropriately named the Big Move, is a consensus plan that has been shaped by municipal leaders across this province and in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, who understand service delivery at the local and regional level. By consulting widely and working together, the Metrolinx board identified the many components of the transit infrastructure that the greater Toronto and Hamilton area residents and businesses need. We really appreciate their excellent work on this plan for the last three years.

Ontario is ready to take the next step to better service the daily transportation needs of the 5.5 million people in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area with a greater, ex-

panded public transit system. That is why today we are proposing to merge GO Transit and Metrolinx through the proposed Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area Transit Implementation Act, 2009.

We want to create an organization with the necessary expertise for implementing an integrated and multi-modal transit network for the most populated region in Ontario. Our government is ready to take the regional transportation plan and at the same time create winning conditions to implement it. To do that, we must first bring the planning and implementation of regional transit projects together. Metrolinx has ably demonstrated its planning expertise with the development of the regional transportation plan and in building the solid foundations for the agencies from the ground up.

At the same time, I want to acknowledge and thank the board members of GO Transit for their wise counsel and service. GO Transit has a very strong track record of building large-scale transit projects and running transit operations and services. The synergy by bringing the two organizations together would not only fulfill the original intent of Metrolinx, it would build continuity as well as getting shovels in the ground faster on new transit projects.

Implementing the regional transportation plan would generate thousands of construction jobs over the coming years and a stronger economy. Leading Canadian economists have made clear the value of investing in infrastructure spending. They recognize that money for transit invigorates the economy and delivers a high rate of return. Ultimately, these investments create valuable assets that spur business growth and make life better. Our government is poised to take decisive action because we know transit investments are important to stimulating the economy while safeguarding our environment.

The economic, social and environmental benefits of moving more quickly to implementation will be substantial. More and better infrastructure projects will mean better transit service and additional capacity to handle more riders. With fewer cars on the road and more people on transit, we will reduce greenhouse gas emissions that are widely known to harm our environment. These projects would mean reducing congestion and greenhouse gas emissions to protect the environment and provide a better quality of life for our families and our communities.

The McGuinty government has made transit one of our top priorities, and we've made history-breaking financial commitments in the process. Our commitment to the regional transportation plan of \$11.5 billion still

stands as the largest single commitment in Canadian transit history. Since 2003, we have invested an additional \$7.4 billion in transit, including more than \$2.5 billion in GO Transit. In our spring 2008 budget, this government committed more than \$744 million to fund all Metrolinx Quick Win transit projects. These Quick Wins included \$305.9 million for Toronto to improve capacity on the Yonge subway and other projects to provide a worthy head start in planning for the TTC's Transit City light rail plan. These investments will strengthen our economy: 10,000 jobs are created or spin off from every billion dollars invested in building transit. The Quick Wins also include \$105.6 million for York region's Viva bus rapid transit system along Highway 7 and Yonge Street corridors.

The list of Metrolinx Quick Wins our government has supported includes various transit improvements and projects in Peel, Halton and Durham regions, and in Hamilton. We invested \$66.1 million for improvements to rapid transit infrastructure in my community of Peel. Halton region's Dundas Street rapid transit received \$57.6 million. Quick Wins included \$82.3 million for the highway-to-BRT spine lane in Durham region, and \$32.8 million for Hamilton to support improvements to the King-Main and James-Upper James rapid transit corridors. Earlier this month, our government announced \$321 million in provincial gas tax funding as an additional source of funding for public transit. Roughly two thirds of all gas tax funding will be delivered to municipalities in the greater Toronto and Hamilton areas. Since 2004, the McGuinty government has committed more than \$1.3 billion through the gas tax program to introduce transit service improvements, as well as promoting increased ridership to 89 transit systems in 111 communities.

0910

I think we have ably demonstrated leadership and attached the necessary funding commitments to build more and better transit, not only in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, but across the province, after years of inaction and a lack of funding by successive governments.

Our transit agenda is certainly ambitious. We are eager, and we cannot wait for the next generation to act. We are looking forward to working with our partners to achieve our goals. Municipalities are crucial partners in this effort. We will continue to work with them to knit together a regional transportation network that will serve all of our constituents more effectively. A new Metrolinx can bring stronger communities together, with a sustainable urban development and renewed transit infrastructure that will promote a higher quality of life for everyone.

Our proposed legislation not only means the merging of GO Transit and Metrolinx; it also puts in place the tools for taking the regional transportation plan off the drawing board and into service. The combined result is the creation of a single regional transportation body that is properly equipped and funded to focus on project delivery. The new Metrolinx will be governed by a board of individuals drawn from the community and private sec-

tor. We are moving to a phase of building and implementation where people with a range of professional and corporate experience will be most helpful. This is a model that we have seen in other large transit agencies around the world and one that we've seen that works. We have appointed a transit adviser for the merger to help the smooth consolidation of Metrolinx and GO Transit. The transition adviser will work with the transition advisory board to quickly bring the two organizations together.

Our proposal will ensure that as Ontario invests taxpayer money for transit infrastructure in the greater Toronto-Hamilton area, Metrolinx will have the ability to design, build and own these assets that could be amortized over their lifetime. These are tools that would allow the new Metrolinx to build the necessary infrastructure, deliver better service to our customers through new transit projects and pay off the asset over the longer term.

Our proposed legislation shows how Ontario is moving forward to build more transit, to do it quickly and do it cost effectively. We have structured our proposal carefully to significantly advance the development of an integrated regional transportation network for the greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

Almost 600 million transit trips occur each year in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. Now is the time for Ontario to build on this momentum and to build a regional transportation network with quick commute times, easy connections and a renewed focus on customer service. We know that building new transit projects will benefit our economy, our communities and our environment. I encourage all members of this House to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member from London-Fanshawe.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm delighted and honoured to stand up in my place this morning to speak in support of the bill being proposed in this House, An Act to amend the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority Act, which was introduced yesterday by the Minister of Transportation. I think it's a very important step toward reforming the transportation system in the province of Ontario.

I was listening to the minister and to the honourable member from Brampton-Springdale speaking about this bill and the important elements in this bill. It's very impressive. It's about time for any government to take a very important step toward amalgamating the many different task forces and authorities together, in order to create an efficient transit system that allows people to move from one spot to another without any problems.

It's important for all of us, especially the people who commute on a regular basis from outside the GTA. I myself go to London every week. As you know, I represent London-Fanshawe. I come on a regular basis. Most of the time I cannot come during the day, in the morning or afternoon, because it's very difficult to cross the city without spending two or three hours, sometimes, on the road. It's like a huge parking lot outside the GTA. You see thousands of cars moving slowly. It would be impossible for people like us, who want to come from London,

Windsor or any place outside the GTA, because the congestion is incredible. It's impossible to come on time to the city of Toronto in the morning or afternoon. So I think by creating one authority and investing more money in the transportation system in this province we'll allow many people who want to commute and come to this beautiful city to be able to come without any problems.

It's important how much we'll save a lot of business people, who I know want to come to Toronto on a regular basis but cannot come in the daytime. They have to come the day before. They have to spend a lot of money on hotels, food etc. Maybe it's good for the hotel and restaurant industries in the city, but economically, it's not viable because so many people waste time. It's like me; when I go back to London, I wait until 7 or 8 o'clock at night to be able to drive easily to my riding, London-Fanshawe. I think creating a transportation system that functions better gives us the ability to move quickly from point A to point B.

Besides that, I had the chance not long ago to meet with the manufacturing industry, which came to Queen's Park to update the MPPs about many different elements. And guess what? The most important thing for them is transportation, because it costs them extra money, especially when they are facing delays on the highway, to come in to or go through Toronto or the GTA. I was shocked when I learned that some auto parts travel between the United States and Canada, back and forth, between six and seven times. Can you imagine? Every single time they have to waste two or three hours. Do you know how much it costs for gas, how much it costs for employees and how much it costs our environment by putting more emissions in the air? All these costly elements would be eliminated or at least reduced if we created an efficient transit system in the province of Ontario.

Besides all this, I think we are facing some challenging economic times. The most important thing in challenging economic times: Many different governments around the globe, to stimulate the economy, go back to infrastructure. This infrastructure is important for the future; important for the present and out into the future. This initiative would create almost 430,000 jobs if this bill is passed and we are able to link those transportation authorities together, to create a wave of massive infrastructure in the transportation system in Ontario to enable us to fix our highways, widen our highways, create subways, build bridges, fix and widen bridges. All this infrastructure is needed badly, in order to create a stimulus package, to enable manufacturers and companies to come to and open in Ontario and to be able to move from one point to other points without any delay. This is a very important step. It's important for all of us: for the business community, for the people who live in Toronto, for emissions, for the environment, for many different elements of our society.

0920

It's really this point: If this bill passes, it will allow us, first, to invest almost \$11.5 billion in this project. I think

that is a massive investment. It will be the first of its kind in the history of the province of Ontario. Also, it will allow almost 800 million new transit trips a year and 300 million car trips off our roads on a yearly basis. It will be a 10-megaton reduction of carbon dioxide emissions in the whole region.

All these elements are important and convincing, as the member from the other side spoke about. He knows about transportation. I know he cares a lot about it. Also, he should listen to his colleagues. The member from Newmarket-Aurora, the critic of the Ministry of Transportation, when he stood up in his place, said, "Often I don't agree with the government, but it's a very important investment. This time I'm going to agree." This is on the record. He said, "It's not often in this House that I stand and agree with something that the minister has done, but I'm going to do that today."

It's a great testament to our commitment to improvement and our vision to see the province of Ontario with a good transit system to allow the great people of Toronto and the Metro Toronto area and Ontario to move quickly and smoothly on a daily basis. It is a very good step.

Everybody knows Hazel McCallion; she's the dean of all the mayors across Canada. I know the honourable minister of municipalities can agree with me, the Honourable Jim Watson. He knows her very well because he's the minister; he has to deal with her basically on a regular basis.

Hon. Jim Watson: Every day.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Every day. She is well known not just in Ontario but across Canada. She's the most talented mayor and a wise mayor. She knows a lot of things about this element of life. She said about this bill that it's important, she agrees with it and she supports it. She came forward and said the government is doing an excellent job to make it easy for the people who live in Toronto and the Metro Toronto area because—

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Is she a Liberal?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: We don't judge. Everybody is free in this province to believe whatever, but when you do something good, I think you deserve the acknowledgment.

I think the Minister of Transportation is doing an excellent job in his position, his role as the Minister of Transportation, to reform transportation in the province of Ontario. As you know, my colleague member opposite said it many different times: It's important for all the people who want to come to Toronto.

You know what? We want to invite people, want to be an inviting city. How can you be an inviting city without reforming the transportation system? Very often I travel around the globe, and I use the transit systems. I was sometimes amazed at some transit systems, like the one in England. You don't have to have a car to move from spot to other spots because the transit system, especially the metro or the subway—what they call the tube there—is important. You can move with no hesitation, no problem, efficiency in place, and everything is perfect. So now Toronto, the GTA, has grown in size and popu-

lation. We have between six million and seven million people, I think, living in this area.

We got used to—I believe every one of us wants a car to travel and to go from his or her house to work. Now we have to change our habits. This habit cannot be changed without implementing a good transit system that people can depend on, because it's important. I think if we pass this bill, we will achieve our goal.

In these tough economic times, people are looking for many different ways to make it easier for business people and give them the tools they need to be able to do their business without extra costs. That is why I'm proud of our government. Last Thursday, it introduced a great budget—a great budget, one of its kind in the history of this province of Ontario. I'll tell you why it's important: In tough economic times, you have to think about the vulnerable people who live among us. You have to think about infrastructure. You have to think about health care. You have to think about education, innovation and research. That's why part of the budget is an important element: Focus on the infrastructure piece. Infrastructure will give us the way to the future, the prosperous future.

We talk about having to change our thinking, because we're losing a lot of traditional jobs. Let's face it: We may not be able to attract the jobs we're losing today back to the province of Ontario in the future. That's why we have to change our way of doing business from traditional jobs to creative, technological jobs, to be able to move people quickly and fast; and to create elements in our budget, economy, society, communities, universities, colleges and training sites to allow people to do better, to utilize their capacity and skills, because this is the way for the future.

I very often attend sessions which my colleague the Honourable Chris Bentley, the Attorney General, puts on almost every week in London, Ontario. He holds a roundtable to bring together people from different sectors—from the university and college, the business community, the city, the federal government, from all the elements of our society in the London area—and we talk.

Do you know what the most important thing is for them? Transportation—how we can be accessible. Some of them talk about expanding our airport to be a place where we can haul products from around the globe and ship to the United States. This is one of the ideas. They talk about widening the 401, what they call the 401 corridor, taking it from London to the border cities like Windsor or Sarnia. It's very important, because every company, every factory, every group wants to invest in the province of Ontario and wants to make sure they have quick access to the huge market in the United States, whether it's the state of Washington, New York or Michigan.

We cannot achieve our goals without investing in our infrastructure. Today we're talking about transportation. I think it's very important—how we can enhance the transportation system in this province. I think the minister got it right and I believe that he is on the right track in the right direction in order to reform our transportation system.

The most important element of this is co-operation from municipalities, especially the city of Toronto, because we believe strongly that we cannot do it alone as a government. We have to partner with municipalities, with strong partners who believe strongly in our commitment to the future. That bright future cannot be achieved, as has been mentioned by many other people, without creating fast and green transportation systems.

The other day I was watching TV and they were talking about Spain, how they have the fast train—250 kilometres per hour, I think. In France, they call it “le train à grande vitesse.” People can commute fast and quickly to go to their jobs. I guess the speed is about 250 kilometres per hour. Can you imagine? If we had those systems in the province of Ontario, people from Windsor could be here in Toronto within a couple of hours instead of spending six or seven hours. If you wanted to commute to Montreal or Ottawa or any place in the province of Ontario, you could go fast and quickly, without losing any time. Instead of coming the day before, wasting your day or afternoon, spending it on a train or bus or whatever, you could come within two hours' time and do your business without any hesitation or problem.

This is what we need. We need a strong, able authority to give us the service we need, because we deserve it, because we work hard. We want to save people time and money. We want to save factories and companies money. It's important, for all of us, to create enhancements to enable companies to save and enhance their productivity and not waste any time.

0930

I was talking to many people who work in agricultural communities, in the agriculture sector. When you want to transport goods from one town to another, especially when you're talking about hogs or cows or chickens, sometimes you are stuck on the highway in cold weather, and do you know how much damage is done in this industry? It's huge. Also, if you are stuck on the highway across the Metro Toronto area or the GTA, for this industry, in hot weather, it's also a disaster. So it would be good not just for the factories and the people, but also for the agricultural industry to be able to transport their goods quickly and without any losses.

I think all these elements will create a good enhancement to our economy and create a good stimulus package for the workers who want to work in the province of Ontario, and also maintain our strength as an economic engine for the whole country. Also, this would be the best and the biggest enhancement ever, not just in Ontario, but in Canada.

I had the chance, with my colleagues Chris Bentley and Deb Matthews, to talk about the budget at our breakfast meeting in Toronto last Friday. Many people were thrilled when we talked about the infrastructure money—they were thrilled. They never saw that one before.

They say—you know what?—that this is a very important government that has taken leadership to work together: federal and provincial governments and municipalities together.

We put the politics aside. We don't believe that politics should play any role in tough times. We should put all ideological differences aside and focus on our economy. That's what we're doing with the federal government right now, even though we have a different ideological approach. But the federal government, the provincial government and municipalities are coming together in one direction: how we can solve this economy, how we can stimulate the economy, how we can create jobs for our people and how we can get out of this dilemma.

It's important, and I think this investment will do us good. It will give us the sense and the ability to achieve our goal: a good working relationship between federal and provincial governments and municipalities.

Also, we don't want to forget our private sector, which is very innovative and creative in this regard. This morning, I got a chance to go to Sutton Group, the green energy sessions, where the Honourable Michael Bryant was speaking to a bunch of people from different sectors. He spoke about our infrastructure, our investment, and people were thrilled with our initiative.

I was sitting at a table sponsored by a gentleman from Windsor, Ontario. He is an innovative person. He created machinery that can fix your pipeline without breaking or cutting the road. That's incredible: "I can fix it without any damages"—and this runs electronically. This is all introduced, all invented in Ontario, in Canada, here.

So this initiative will see the light and see good support if this bill passes. Other companies will prosper, not just in Ontario and in Canada, but also worldwide, because people will come to us and ask us about technology and our inventions. That's why it's important for all of us to continue working towards changing our habits, our directions, creating a massive wave of new ideas, and patenting those ideas and taking them to the next generation, because it's important.

As I mentioned at the beginning, the jobs we're losing right now, what we call traditional jobs, are not going to come back to us. We have to find and create a way to pave the road for our children, who will be looking for future jobs. So it's our responsibility to work together—municipalities, provincial and federal governments—to create a strong economy, a strong country and a strong province.

Thank you for allowing me to speak. I want to congratulate my colleague, who gave me the chance to speak, and also the Minister of Transportation for introducing a very historic and impressive bill that will enable us, as the citizens of this province—and also people who want to visit us from outside Canada—to move quickly and smoothly without any problem.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Eglinton—Lawrence.

Mr. Mike Colle: Good morning, Mr. Speaker and my fellow colleagues.

I know that the Minister of Health is very interested in public transit. His riding, especially, is very transit-dependent, but they don't have the investment they deserve in Don Valley East for public transit. So I know

he's very interested in public transit, and I'm sure he's going to be a big supporter of Bill 163, as the member from Oshawa knows—

Mr. John O'Toole: Oshawa?

Mr. Mike Colle: Durham, excuse me—how important it is to Durham.

In fact, as the Minister of Health knows full well, if we don't fix public transit, he's going to need more money in his health budget because of the number of people who are breathing the different pollutants that come out of cars every day, 24 hours a day, spewing chemicals into the air.

The member from London—Fanshawe mentioned the cost of gridlock. In the past, it has been estimated by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and the Toronto Board of Trade that the cost of gridlock is probably about \$3 billion a year. That's the number of extra dollars that we have to pay for our gasoline and that companies delivering goods and services pay for their fuel prices. Also, they have to pay more workers to deliver more goods. Rather than it taking an hour to deliver a product from Mississauga to Brampton, it would take two hours, because the fact is that the roads from Mississauga to Brampton are clogged. Highway 10 there is bumper to bumper 24 hours a day. That's because people trying to get from Mississauga to beautiful downtown Brampton can't get there because of the congestion, and because of the fact that there isn't good, direct public transit between those two great cities.

People forget, and that's why this bill is so important. This bill is a transit bill beyond the core of public transit—that's the core in Toronto. It reaches out to the sources of gridlock. That is because people living in Brampton, especially, have few opportunities to get public transit into Mississauga. And never mind Mississauga: They cannot get to Vaughan city centre; they cannot get to downtown Toronto because there isn't enough public transit infrastructure. That's what this bill does: It basically streamlines the implementation of public transit investments throughout the GTA. That's why we need to support this bill, because the bill talks about implementation.

We've been talking about doing something for public transit for 30 years. Toronto and the GTA—especially Toronto—was seen as the poster child for public transit. If you went to Europe, they knew about Toronto's subways, the great work done by Mayor Allan Lamport, that great mayor of Toronto. I'm sure the Minister of Municipal Affairs thinks it's about time he recognized this mayor for his great work.

I know he's not from Ottawa, but this was one of the best mayors Toronto ever had, and that's Mayor Horatio Hocken. The Minister of Municipal Affairs should recognize Horatio Hocken for his foresight. What Horatio Hocken did at the turn of the century is, he had the foresight—and the Minister of Health should have the foresight to support this initiative—because what Horatio Hocken did is put on the table the fact that one day there would be a subway across the Don River, the Prince

Edward Viaduct. So when they were building the Prince Edward Viaduct at the turn of the century, Horatio Hocken ran on the platform—when he ran for mayor of Toronto, he said, “When we’re building the Prince Edward Viaduct”—for the pages, it’s a bridge across the Don River—“we should deck underneath the Prince Edward Viaduct bridge so that one day in the future, if there’s ever a subway linking Toronto to the Danforth, there will be access by a subway.” This is back at the turn of the century. In fact, he lost the election because he said he wanted to invest \$1 million into decking the Prince Edward Viaduct. He lost the election, but then the next term along, they did do it. So if you go across the Prince Edward Viaduct right now to the Danforth, you’ll see that the subway goes underneath that bridge. That’s why the Minister of Municipal Affairs should recognize Horatio Hocken for the incredible vision that he had at that early time. There was a mayor who was a visionary.

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If you go to Ottawa today it’s the same type of thing. They’re still talking and talking about putting a transit line in Ottawa. They’ll talk until the cows come home—but this is not something peculiar to Ottawa; it’s peculiar to Toronto, too. We talk and talk about investing in transit, but this bill is about implementation. It’s about putting money where our mouth is, and that’s why this bill is dovetailing with the massive investment we as a government and the people of Ontario are making in public transit—over \$11 billion.

The good thing about this investment through Metrolinx is that this is not the usual cost-sharing arrangement. The \$11 billion we’re talking about is 100% provincial money. It’s not asking the municipalities to cost-share the capital, which is quite unusual. That’s how much the Minister of Transportation, Mr. Bradley, feels about public transit. And it looks very promising. The federal government is finally being very positive on this front. They’re going to partner; then we can end up with \$17 billion invested in public transit in Ontario as a result of the federal government partnering. The municipal governments have to implement with their planning process, which they’re doing right now, but the capital dollars are 100% provincial to start off with, and then the federal will bring us up to \$17 billion.

The critical thing here is that we need a seamless planning and implementation system because the political maps of the GTA are no longer the transportation maps. That’s why in Don Valley East there’s daily congestion—cars pouring in from York region because people from York region have very little opportunity to get into Toronto because of the lack of transportation planning that crosses the political boundaries. It’s just as if in Don Valley East, when they built that sewer—there’s a major trunk sewer there—it stopped at Steeles Avenue. They don’t build sewer lines based on political maps. You can imagine water lines stopping at Steeles Avenue and sewer lines stopping at Steeles Avenue. Don Valley East would be flooded with sewage if that were the case. But because of the planning of the works department in the

greater Toronto area, those sewage lines go across political boundaries.

Yet the transit projects do not recognize the transportation or travel habits of people. People going to and from work from Brampton to Toronto don’t stop at Steeles Avenue; they have to work in Toronto, or vice versa. Yet our political transportation network that exists today is based on a 20th-century vision that people lived and worked in East York, lived and worked in Toronto or lived and worked in Brampton. That’s not the case anymore. People from Brampton work in Durham—and Durham is one area that needs attention, because Durham is a critical, fast-growing area. That’s why this bill has to connect Durham to Toronto and to Mississauga. That’s why the critical thing here is that this bill, if you look at what Metrolinx is going to do, puts together the reality of people’s work trips and travel trips, as I said.

One of the projects which is very close to my heart is the Eglinton rapid transit line. For 60 years, great transit planners—we’ve got two of the best in the world, Dick Soberman and Ed Levy; one lives across the street from me—have been telling governments that you have to have a transit line linking Durham to Mississauga to Peel region, and that transit line is Eglinton Avenue. Eglinton Avenue is the longest east-west open route that connects Peel region to Durham region right through the heart of Toronto. It is a crying shame that there is no rapid transit line on Eglinton Avenue, because it is the critical east-west link. As you know, through bad planning and poor foresight, in 1996, the then government of another party stopped the building of that transit line. In fact, there was \$100 million spent in lowering the sewer, building the station at Eglinton West, and in the middle of the building of the subway on Eglinton Avenue, they filled in the hole with concrete and filled in the station with concrete. That was probably one of the biggest transit mistakes in the history of Toronto. So right now we have to start that all over again. The Eglinton transit line would have been completed by now. People would have been travelling from Yonge Street, Leaside, all the way out to the airport. It would have cost about \$1 billion and it would have been done. Instead, now we have to revisit that. Luckily, it’s still on the planning board. It might cost \$2 billion to \$3 billion to do something that would have already been done at one point.

Anyway, I don’t want to talk about the past. Let’s talk about the future. And this is what this bill is: It talks about integrating GO Transit. If you know GO Transit, it is another system of transportation that is recognized across the world. GO Transit was one of the first systems that did double-decking. That was done with great foresight. Again, I think it was during the Bill Davis era, and I really credit Bill Davis because he understood public transit. It was also Bill Davis who stopped the Spadina Expressway, with the help of Jane Jacobs. They said that you can’t build an expressway through a city, the heart of the city, the Spadina subway. The late Colin Vaughan, Adam Vaughan’s father—they all said at that time that building a road in the heart of Toronto would have

destroyed all those neighbourhoods and would have caused pollution by the tonne to go into the centre of the city.

Bill Davis listened to Jane Jacobs and they stopped that madness and put a subway line, God forbid, down the ditch, down the Davis ditch, they used to call it. Now we have a subway line that I took this morning and that I take every morning, because driving is a pain in the neck here in Toronto, as it is in Brampton. The member from Scarborough Southwest was saying it took him—I don't know how many hours—two hours to get from downtown Scarborough to Toronto. The member from Don Valley East should know this. Trying to get from Don Valley East, Minister of Health, how many hours does it take because there's not enough public transit? It shouldn't take you two hours to come from Scarborough into downtown Toronto.

This investment in implementation and coordinating GO Transit, which, as I said, is one of the most respected transit systems, is interregional. It goes from downtown Toronto all the way out to Mississauga, to Brampton, all the way to York region—the buses, the trains—to Oakville. The GO Transit system is now going to be implementing transit planning and implementation, as I've said, along with Metrolinx. In other words, the sewer lines aren't going to stop at the Mississauga-Toronto border. They're not going to stop at the Durham-Scarborough border. This will mean that the transit movement, the modal split, will change because it won't be just the city of Toronto, the TTC, doing its planning. It will be done on a regional basis, which is done in every major city in the world. Whether you go to Atlanta, to the lower mainland in BC, to Dusseldorf, to Paris, to London, to Madrid, every major city in the world has a regional planning outlook. In many cases it's done by the federal government and the local state governments. That's what has got to be done. You have to have transit planning implementation that recognizes the fact that people do not live and work in the same communities as before.

I can remember years ago, too long to remember, when I was on the TTC, when there was another transit expansion program we were doing at that time, and a lot of deputants came to us and said, "Well, listen, with the computer, people won't be travelling as much"—they call it telecommuting or something like that—"so why are you spending this money on transit? People will work at home, send e-mails and they'll be doing everything on the Internet. They won't come into work. They won't have to come into work, so why invest money in public transit when everything is going to be done by computer? People will not have to drive."

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Over and over again, all these so-called visionaries who said, "Invest in computers; don't invest in public transit" were dead wrong, Mr. Speaker, because you know yourself, coming in from Wellington county, there are people in cars, wall-to-wall cars, because whether you have computers or not, people have to travel. They

still travel: delivery of goods and services, the shopping trips, the visitations, the doctors' visits. The computers have not diminished the trips. Those phony visionaries who said, "We'll all be telecommuting," were wrong back in the 1980s. Try to get from Aldershot to downtown Hamilton. See the problems.

That's why this comprehensive program invests in Hamilton in a big, big way. I'd love to see the day when the electric rail cars are running in Hamilton again. I'd like to see the day when there are electric light rail cars running throughout the GTA, that even in Durham—Courtice and Clarington and throughout all those beautiful areas—there will be light rail cars all the way across the lake, so that people have a choice. People now take their cars because they don't have much choice.

The GO Transit system has been expanded. As you know, we made some excellent investments in recent years. One of the ways we do this is through the gas tax. We are one of the few jurisdictions now that spends and invests huge amounts of money, over \$320 million a year. Part of the gas tax goes directly into public transit. In fact, I think about 65% or more goes in the GTA, and that's because it's based on the number of trips and the ridership. When the GTA, which is almost six million people if you go all the way to Hamilton, all the way to Niagara Falls, all the way to Peterborough—I'll talk about Peterborough later. You have to have investment in public transit so that there's more room on the roads for the trucks and the service people who need the roads.

If you stand at any corner in Toronto, if you stand right here outside the Legislature—and I see it on a daily basis: I'm trying to get across to the Legislature, and for 99% of the people driving by the Legislature, there's one person in the car. Half of them are on their cell phones. The member from Durham knows that full well. Half of them are on a cell phone; there's one person in the car. They're filing by here 24 hours a day, seven days a week, one person in the car. That is a waste of energy; that's a waste of time. We have to give people the option to take transit.

One of the reasons why so many are coming down in the car is because some people who live out in Don Valley East—as I said, that's one area especially that needs public transit—don't have the option of taking that bus or subway. That's why this Metrolinx will support the extension of the York University line all the way through York University right up to the great city of Vaughan, because that's where the car trips originate. We can do all the great things we're doing with the King Street streetcar and all the great things we've done with the St. Clair streetcar, but if you don't fix the root of the problem—and the roots come from Durham; the roots of the transit trips come from York region.

The other day, I was having an argument with a guy at the grocery store, at Sobeys. I said to him, "Well, how many people do you think live in Mississauga?" He was arguing about the fact that we shouldn't invest in Mississauga, that we should put the money in the TTC. I said, "Listen, where do you think your problems come

from? People from Mississauga need transit. They have to get to work here in Toronto, and vice versa. How many people live in Mississauga?" He said, "Well, 300,000 or 400,000." I said, "More." "Six hundred thousand." There are a million good people living in Mississauga—a million. Brampton: How many live in Brampton now?

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: Six hundred thousand.

Mr. Mike Colle: Six hundred thousand. When Bill Davis was there, there were 60,000. Six hundred thousand people deserve public transit, because they are the source of the car trips that come into downtown Toronto. If you want to solve Toronto's congestion issues, you have to go up to the source.

How many people drive from Hamilton and Carlisle and Aldershot? They come in because they don't have the option of all-day GO. We should be running trains all across this GTA. Maybe one day, God forbid, we will actually have electric trains. The whole world is electrified; we're still diesel-fied here. But I won't go there any more.

That's how far behind we've gotten because we've been navel-gazing about it for 30 years in this province. The other cities and countries of the world have put us to shame because they've implemented; they've put things into action. We've got a rail line being discussed to go from downtown Toronto, Union Station, all the way up to the airport. It's been discussed now for eight years. There's already a rail line there. Someday, maybe in another eight years, it will be done. Who knows? All we've really got to show for it—and that's because there wasn't a proper visionary—is the Sheppard subway line that goes nowhere with nobody on it, because there wasn't the regional planning. That's all we've got to show for it. We should have been putting in a subway line or light rail lines going into York region or Durham region. Anyway, we won't go back to the Sheppard line.

The critical thing here is that this bill is a lot more significant than just who is on the board of directors. It's a lot more significant in terms of who's on it. The significance here is that the Minister of Transportation, in his foresight, has put together an implementation plan whereby the planning—and you need a lot of planning in public transit because there are sewer lines that have to be moved, you have to have environmental assessment impact studies, engineering studies; you have to have integrated planning across the GTA and beyond. As I've said, this has to go to Hamilton, it's got to go to Peterborough and it's got to go up to Pontypool. It's got to go into these areas to be effective. I hope the members from Hamilton get up and talk about the need for public transit in Hamilton. That's going to create jobs, because public transit is directly linked to the steel industry because of all the rails you have to put down. If you want to see an explosion or the full firing of the steel industry in Hamilton, you've got to support public transit, because the trains, the streetcars and the subway cars are built in Thunder Bay; the steel comes from Hamilton. Never mind the transit jobs; it's going to provide the steel jobs,

because the steel for the rails, the trains and the cars comes from Hamilton.

I hope Hamilton takes the lead on supporting this integration implementation of transit across the GTA, from Niagara Falls all the way to Pontypool. That's what should be done here. We can't stop at Steeles Avenue. We can't stop at the Don River. We've got to get to Brampton especially: 600,000 hard-working people deserve—if you want to talk about congestion, people say to me, "Gee, there's so much traffic on Queen Street." Queen Street in Toronto is a joy. The streetcar moves rapidly from the Humber—in fact, the Solicitor General, from Sudbury, knows if tourists from Sudbury want to go to Toronto, the best way to see Toronto is to take the Queen streetcar. Take it from in front of city hall and do the loop all the way past the Don River to the east and go all the way to the Humber. For a couple of bucks, you've got the best view of the city of Toronto, face first on the Queen Street streetcar.

But they say there's traffic on Queen Street. If you want to see traffic, go up to Bovaird Drive in Brampton; go up to York region at Highway 7, where Al Palladini's motors is at Weston Road. It's mayhem there—trucks, cars. It's mayhem because there is no public transit infrastructure that's sufficient to meet the needs of the people.

This seamless integrated process is futuristic, but it's also implementation. Our biggest hurdle is trying to get consensus, because by nature—and the member from Durham knows this very well—when you sit on these regional councils, everybody worries about their own constituency, so it's very difficult sometimes for elected officials to think of the bigger picture. Certainly, in the past, what it has been is an approach to say, "Well, we've got to do this piecemeal." But the piecemeal approach doesn't work in transit; you have to look at the overall encompassing transit patterns and where you get the biggest bang for your buck. That's why Metrolinx and GO—hopefully, if this bill is passed—will be integrated into this new plan.

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Again, the good thing is that we've already been investing in public transit—\$1.3 billion or \$1.4 billion already to Ontario municipalities for better public transit—and in every budget, we've had major investments in capital projects. We're upgrading the GO stations. You saw the announcement from Prime Minister Harper and Premier McGuinty.

There are shovel-ready projects, but the shovel-ready projects won't be implemented if there's eight more years of navel-gazing and deciding what's going to be built. We're going to choke in exhaust fumes, and it's going to be difficult for businesses to thrive, because their costs are going to go up as there's more and more grid-lock.

Also, in terms of quality of life, if you go to the best cities in the world, the ones that have the best quality of life are usually the ones that have good public transit. If you go to Amsterdam, that's a perfect example of excellent public transit, where you can move easily through

an ancient city, seamlessly, on bicycles or public transit. That's the kind of city that's ideal. It's not going to happen in Thunder Bay, but it's something that we can do.

What we can do in Thunder Bay with this kind of support—and I hope the Minister of Northern Development and Mines supports this bill, because it means thousands of jobs for the steelworkers and the excellent workers in Thunder Bay. That's why I get upset sometimes. People say, "You're spending all this money in Toronto, on transit." In fact, I was there, I think in 1993, when I signed the contract for \$1 billion to have the Toronto Transit cars, the T1 cars, made in Thunder Bay. And I think the people of Thunder Bay realize they're linked in transit with the people of Toronto, because if we get subway cars and streetcars here in Toronto, Hamilton wins—Hamilton is the biggest winner of all, actually—and Thunder Bay is next.

That's why we're all in this together as a province, and we shouldn't put down this investment in transit as something that just deals with Durham or Brampton. These are jobs. This is economic competitiveness at its best. Look at the most economically viable cities. Look at Singapore. It puts us to shame, the investments they've made in Singapore.

This is a time and a place to do something that is good for our quality of life, good for our economy, good for our environment, and it will get rid of a lot of the frustration that people have who have to come down from Don Valley East and Brampton and Durham every day or Scarborough–Southwest and fight this traffic mayhem. Let's think of them when we're thinking of this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: First of all, I want to acknowledge, praise and compliment the member from Eglinton–Lawrence. He knows where Durham is; in fact, you could say it's the eastern gateway to Toronto. I'm pleased to represent the riding, and much of what he said I agree with.

It's a matter of having a plan, which is something in a general sense we heard last week in the budget that the McGuinty government doesn't really have: a plan. But this is one where they are certainly on the right track, to use a term.

In terms of the bill, if you'll recall, Mr. Speaker—and you might, because I used to sit close to you—when they introduced Metrolinx, the Greater Toronto Transit Authority, we responded—at that time I was the critic—and we said at that time that the governance model was completely incorrect, and the bill modifies that. The board used to be comprised of 11 people.

Now here's the issue. The organization prior to this was this: It was gridlock in its own design. There were four people from Halton, Peel, York and Durham, one from each; and there were five people from Toronto, which gave David Miller and Adam Giambrone all the control; and then, for safety, the Ministry of Transportation had the chair and the vice-chair. So Minister Bradley ran it; there's no question about it. He sent the two chairs

down with the notes, "Do this," and they did the minister's bidding.

Now, the new organization is a governance model that prohibits elected people—municipal, provincial or federal. That's very important to get the governance part right. However, I still question the legitimacy here. If I look at the changing of the corporate sizing—I wonder if I could have more time, because I certainly can't get this all on the record in such a short time.

Here's the deal, though: The minister's going to appoint all of them now. In fact, they're going to be putting 15 people on the payroll. That's the deal, the order in council. They're Liberal Party supporters, basically. What do you think Robert Prichard is? He's a well-known Liberal, and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's interesting; you know you've been around in this place long enough when you see the bills that are fallout from bills that you dealt with a number of years ago. The original bill that set up the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority had all these provisions in it of having GO Transit rolled into Metrolinx. I thought that it would have been acted on sooner, but nonetheless, the moment has come.

I think the critical point, though, is the reality that all of those who are out there today, who are waiting on GO platforms or waiting for a Viva bus or simply stuck in gridlock somewhere on the QEW, should know that this is a shuffling of the chairs on the decks of a ship that is not going very far. If the fundamental issue is not taken care of, if the money isn't put in place to actually make sure that transit works, and works at a price that's affordable to people, that attracts people in, then frankly, it's not going to resolve the problems. You can structure and restructure as much as you want.

The fundamental problems have to deal with urban planning in the greater Toronto area and the greater Golden Horseshoe. Those have not been addressed. The Smart Growth plan that came out was criticized by people who do urban planning for essentially giving us a status quo model, one that looks good on paper but that in fact will lead to more and more gridlock as the years go by. The failure of the government to put the money in place for operating and capital for local transit operations, the failure to actually move in the last—what has it been?—two years to get things in place that have already been planned, says to me that we will see more and more of these bills that speak to restructuring, or even just new structuring, but in the end won't take on the transit crunch and will leave us with all the urban ills that my Liberal colleagues have outlined, saying this bill will deal with them. This bill won't.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'm proud to join in this debate and add a few comments, but I have to say that I was taken aback by my colleague from Eglinton–Lawrence

and his passion on this particular issue. I know my colleague served on the TTC way back when, and I'm sure he, like myself, sat on that commission and heard, over the years, the discussions that went on without action. To be honest to everyone, a lot of the inaction has taken place because transit was not well funded in the past. Previous provincial governments and federal governments would request that the cities look at transit and look at regional transit, but when it came time to fund the studies that were done over time, the monies would never come forward. Those studies would sit on the shelf and collect dust.

I have to say I'm sort of very proud that this government created Metrolinx. I was disappointed at the first call, when the appointed board members were all politicians, because I think that was the biggest mistake. I'll be honest with you: I was a member of Toronto council when the previous government created the GTSB. I was a member of that GTSB. And the parochialism that exists between the cities in the Toronto and greater Toronto region is the biggest roadblock in moving progress, if I could put it that way, forward. So I think what this government is doing—we have realized that. We've committed \$17.9 billion to transit. We need regional transit. We need a body that can cross boundaries without political interference and without roadblocks being placed in front of it. I think we're doing the right thing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to add some comments to Bill 163, which is An Act to amend the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority Act. Of course, the bill was just introduced yesterday afternoon. We haven't actually even had a chance to have a good look at it, although I gather it's a change in governance that we've been recommending: taking the politicians off the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority.

I would just like to raise the question, what is taking so long to get an integrated transit system in southern Ontario? You go to other parts of the world, and they have systems that are much more integrated. I think back to 1988, when I was in Hong Kong. You could use their subway system—you had a card you used. You put it in when you got on at one spot, it deducted the fare, and you got off at another spot. We should have a system like that, whether you're getting on GO Transit in Barrie and ending up in Toronto, or from Durham or wherever.

My pet peeve is the TTC's crazy token system. Whether you're going a block or whether you're going the whole extent of the service, you pay the same fee, which is absolutely ridiculous.

Two years ago, I had the pleasure of being in Paris and London for our 25th anniversary, and we used the transit systems there. In London, they have the Oyster card. It works on buses. You get on, you just flash it by a device, and then you flash it when you get off, and it deducts your fee. You can add extra value to the card at many spots, at pretty much any transit location. We should have the same thing here in Ontario.

It's time for us to get moving on this because we're way behind the ball.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): One of the government members has two minutes to respond. I'll return to the member for Brampton–Springdale.

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I don't know if everybody has noticed this morning, but we've had a very lively discussion. I just want to thank all the members for participating, and the member from London–Fanshawe for his thoughts. They were interesting. He was engaged and enthusiastic. Certainly, the members for Parry Sound and Durham added some very useful comments. I'm not as cynical and as jaded as the member from Toronto–Danforth. I believe in this process. I think it's going to move forward, and I think we can hear the enthusiasm for this. I'd particularly like to thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for his history lesson. I think a lot of us haven't been around that long, and if you don't remember your history, you are doomed to repeat it.

I think we're a government that pays attention. We want to help all Ontarians. Certainly, a lot of our northern members were listening closely to the minister's announcement yesterday, because they care about the potholes in Sudbury and Thunder Bay. They know that this is all part of a longer transit continuum and that we need to make these investments throughout Ontario to make transportation a better thing. We want to get it right. We want to put the investments and the right people in place. We are eager to get going. We want to do it properly. We're going to listen very carefully to the debate that occurs in this House. We're going to be listening at committee to find out the best ideas to move this forward; to put the right people in place to make those decisions; to give them the authority to move forward on making transit more efficient, more economical, more green; and to put in place a visionary exercise that provides implementation quickly and gets those shovel-ready projects in the ground for all the municipalities—because this benefits businesses, communities and families across Ontario.

We look forward to moving forward on this. I want to thank all the members for their support this morning.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being quite close to 10:15, this House now stands in recess until question period at 10:30.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to welcome some very special guests to the members' gallery who are visiting us today in honour of Epilepsy Awareness Month: Mac Burnham, of Epilepsy Ontario; his colleague neurologist Richard Wennberg; Ms. Margaret Maye, who's been a tireless advocate about epilepsy, and her son, Thomas Drag, who is here and for whom she has become a champion of this important cause.

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: It's my pleasure to introduce to the House this morning Michelle Parker and Thomas

Parker, who are family members of page Emily Parker from my home community of Barrie. Page Emily Parker today is the captain of the legislative pages. She has come to Queen's Park following in the footsteps of her brother, who was also page here at the Legislature. Welcome.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to introduce my guest, Laura Beaulne-Staubing. She has recently been working with the social planning council in Waterloo region, working on a project that will determine the cost of living and a living wage for the Waterloo region. Welcome, Laura.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Halton, Mr. Chudleigh, and page Ian Coomes, I'd like to welcome his mother, Janet Coomes, and his father, Carlo Meola, to the Legislature today.

On behalf of the leader of the Opposition, Mr. Runciman, and page Renée Bongers, I'd like to welcome her mom, Christine Bongers, and her friends Adrienne Fournier, Stephanie Fournier and Lori Gilbert to the Legislature today.

There being no further introductions, it is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, just outside this House, the finance minister told the media that he hasn't heard any negative reaction to last Thursday's budget. Premier, would you agree with your finance minister? Have you not heard any negative reaction to your record-setting, debt-laden budget?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let me tell you a little bit more about the budget, and I had the opportunity to talk to the media about it this morning, in terms of the balanced approach that we're trying to bring through this particular piece of public policy. We are both reducing corporate income taxes and increasing the Ontario child benefit. We're reducing the small business corporate tax rate and we're increasing the minimum wage. We're eliminating the small business clawback and reducing income taxes on the lowest income earners to the lowest level in Canada. On top of that, we're building affordable housing and we're increasing funding for health care, education and post-secondary education. I think it's a budget that is suited to the times. It's going to build both a more competitive and a more caring Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It's the old "Everybody be happy" message from this Premier. He has mused about the world changing and that we need to move forward. The people of this province need to be leery, as it's clear that the Premier's interpretation of moving forward is massive taxes, furthered by increased costs on basic essentials that everyday families need: gasoline, groceries, school supplies.

Under this latest tax grab, the average family is going to be paying at least \$500 in additional McGuinty taxes just to fill up the car to go to work, to go to the doctor, to take the kids to school; customers at the door, at the till, at the gate, at the pump, once again being hit hard by you, Mr. Premier.

Premier, why haven't you been straight with Ontarians and told them that when they go to the gas pumps in July of next year, they'll be facing an 8% hike in gas prices because of this new tax grab?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: In fact, there are a lot of taxes being cut in this budget. We're cutting taxes for businesses by \$4.5 billion, but we're cutting taxes for people by more than twice that amount; in fact, by over \$10 billion. There are \$2.3 billion in permanent tax cuts for Ontarians; 93% of Ontarians are going to get a personal income tax cut.

As I say, we've tried to be balanced. We understood that bringing in a single sales tax would create challenges. That's why we've gone out of our way to ensure that we minimize the impact on our families. The overwhelming majority of Ontario families are going to be ahead as a result of this budget and our comprehensive tax package.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I think that starting July 1, 2010, people will determine that by themselves, not based on your rhetoric.

We said earlier that Dalton giveth and Dalton taketh away, and he's taking away much more than he's giving. Minister Duncan deserves to be in the tax-and-spend hall of fame. He has somehow found a way to make Floyd Laughren and Bob Rae seem like penny-pinchers. I got an e-mail yesterday which I thought was quite profound: "Liberals have been spending taxpayers' money like Duncan sailors." I thought that was quite accurate.

Why does it seem that communities in every corner of this province are absolutely terrified of more bully tactics from a Premier and a government with an insatiable appetite for taxing and spending? Are seniors and hard-working families supposed to simply allow you—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I get the sense that we're probably in the right place when it comes to the budget, because on the one hand we're being accused by the Conservatives of being in the hands of the left wing, and we're being accused by the NDP of being in the hands of the right wing.

What I think Ontarians want to know is that we understand that it's not about right or left; it's about moving forward. This budget is designed to move our province forward and it's designed to do that in a way that is in keeping with our fundamental values. We want a more competitive province and we want a more caring province at the same time. We want a stronger economy so that it generates the jobs and creates the wealth that enables us to support good schools for our kids, good health

care for all our families and strong environmental protections for all of us. Those are the kinds of values that have informed this budget and that have always informed our government policies.

TAXATION

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Back to the Premier: Yesterday, the Premier had another “mea culpa” day and admitted to “muddying the waters” with respect to the minimum wage policy, after a flip, a flop and another flip. He has now stated that he’s prepared to honour that commitment.

Premier, what about commitments to Ontarians not to raise taxes, which you failed to honour? I have a quote here from June 3, 2007, when I guess you launched your platform. A reporter said, “You promise not to raise taxes?” Dalton McGuinty: “Yes.” The reporter: “Why should we believe you this time?” Dalton McGuinty replied, “Because I’m in charge.” That says a great deal. Yes, you are in charge, and yet again you’ve broken another solemn oath to the people of this province. Premier, how can you stand in your place and tell Ontarians that picking and choosing which commitments to honour is what you consider real integrity and leadership?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I don’t like to use a lot of numbers, but sometimes you have to. We’re cutting a lot of taxes through this budget in an effort to create a more competitive economy. We’re cutting them for businesses by \$4.5 billion. We’re cutting them for individuals by \$10.3 billion; \$2.3 billion are personal income tax cuts for individual Ontarians.

In addition to those tax cuts, as I say, we have found a way to invest more in health care. In fact, health care funding this year will go up by 4.5%. Education funding this year goes up by 6.8%. Investment in post-secondary education goes up by 8.2%. Again, we are building both a strong and competitive economy and a more caring Ontario that presents ever more opportunities for the people of Ontario to grow and to flourish.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Yet again, the Premier and his sheep-like backbench followers are purposely muddying the waters on their scheme to deliver their debt-ridden budget of massive tax grabs and massive spending.

Premier, your attempt to buy voters with their own money is clearly an admission that your new tax scheme is not any type of reform but a net tax increase. The Ontario Federation of Labour refers to this as “political trickery.” It’s this Premier’s utter disregard for solemn promises to voters that is the heart of the matter. Premier, is this another premeditated broken promise to taxpayers that you think the good people of this province are just going to forgive and forget yet again?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I said that the world had changed, but I never knew it had changed that much. We

now have the leader of the Conservative Party quoting the Ontario Federation of Labour, which represents a dramatic change.

Again, I want Ontarians to understand that we’ve worked hard to put forward a balanced approach to the people’s finances. It’s true we’re reducing corporate income taxes, but we’re also increasing the Ontario child benefit. We are increasing the minimum wage. We are investing in affordable housing. We’re going to make sure that Ontario’s low-income earners pay the lowest level of personal taxes in the country. We think it is balanced. We think it’s in keeping with our values. We think it’s the kind of budget that Ontarians expected of us.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I guess the Premier forgets that I’m a former union president. We’re with the people of this province.

Last week, the Toronto Sun quoted the Premier’s latest massive tax grab and three instalment payoff as—and I’m quoting—“a bribe” to the taxpayers of this province. To lend validity to that argument, I think it’s important to note that the final instalment occurs just weeks before the next provincial election. According to the Premier, using taxpayers’ own money, in its essence, the Sun says—and we share that view—to bribe them is what he views as confronting the challenge. The Premier and his ministers mockingly referred to this as transitional funding. I want to paraphrase your good friend Michael Ignatieff; this sounds along the lines of “a bribe if necessary, but not necessarily a bribe.”

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock for a minute. I remind the member that you shouldn’t be saying indirectly what you want to say directly and would ask him to refrain from using those comments.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The Minister of Finance and our financial officials worked long and hard, together with the federal government, to see what we might come up with by way of a package to ease the transition as we move towards a single sales tax. The federal government has agreed to provide with us \$4.3 billion. We’re going to take \$4 billion of that and transfer it directly to Ontarians through these cheques. Then we are going to take \$300 million plus another \$100 million on top of that and give it to our businesses to help them with the transition costs as well. We think that’s only fair. Is the leader of the official opposition suggesting we just take that \$4.3 billion we got from the feds and pocket it? The purpose of that money in the first instance, the reason that we negotiated such a healthy deal for Ontarians, is to help ease them through this transition period. We think that’s fair on the part of the federal government, and we think it’s right on our part that we transfer that to Ontarians.

WOMEN’S ISSUES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The question is to the Premier. The word “women” didn’t appear once in Thursday’s

budget. According to StatsCan, the median income for a working Ontario woman is \$24,000, compared to \$35,600 for men. That means that women have disproportionately less disposable income than men and less room to absorb the impact of the McGuinty Liberals' 8% tax hike. In struggling times, why is this Premier adding 8% to women's monthly bills?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just don't see that, and I can't support that assertion on the part of my honourable colleague, if you think of the areas where we're putting in special support. We're increasing the Ontario child benefit. When we're talking about single-parent families, they are overwhelmingly led by mums, not dads. When we talk about increasing the minimum wage, there are a disproportionate number of women working for a minimum wage in comparison to men. If we're reducing income taxes for people working at the lowest level, again disproportionately, that segment of our workforce is represented by women. If we're building more affordable housing, again to accommodate many single mums, that too benefits women. So I just can't agree with my honourable colleague in her assertion that somehow this budget discriminates against women. In fact, you might argue just the opposite.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This budget was an opportunity to make issues that affect women, like jobs, pay equity and child care, a priority. Instead, the Premier is forcing through a tax hike that will disproportionately affect women. For gas to get to work in the morning, to drive the kids around after school: 8% more. To heat the home and pay the electricity bills: 8% more. For that morning coffee: 8% more. For the trip to the gym: 8% more. Why is this Premier tacking 8% more on our bills?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague makes reference to a number of areas where more work is required, and I'll admit that. But it's just one budget, and if you take a look at what we've managed to do, given this tremendous economic challenge that we have to grapple with, I think it's significant. As well, if you talk about investing in health care, that's very important to everyone in a family. Investing in education is very important to everyone in the family—investing in post-secondary education. If you talk to mums, if there's something that they want for their kids, it's that they want them to grow up strong and healthy and to find opportunities to succeed. Those are the kinds of public services that support all our families.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Premier McGuinty's tax is unfair to all families but it especially hurts middle-income women. Combined with lower salaries and fewer benefits, the deepening recession is making life a lot harder for Ontario women. Instead of a plan to create and sustain women's jobs, women are getting an 8% tax hike in a recession that is hurting families. Why is this Premier tacking on 8% to our bills?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague brings her own particular perspective on this; I respectfully disagree with that perspective.

I want to come back to something I said at the outset. We've tried to put forward a package of economic proposals that speak to the values of Ontarians. Ontarians know we need to do something and we need to do it together to make this economy stronger so it can support our public services that we want and that we want to give to our kids. At the same time, we want to build a more caring Ontario. So we have a package that cuts taxes for our businesses and at the same time improves standards for people, especially those in the vulnerable classes. That's why we're increasing the Ontario child benefit. That's why we're increasing the minimum wage. That's why we're going to ensure that the level of taxation paid by the lowest income-earning Ontarians is the lowest in the country and why we invest in affordable housing and we put more money into health care and education and post-secondary education and we create 300,000 more jobs. I think it's a pretty good package—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier.

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Premier again: The fact is, the Premier's budget failed women. While there was some talk of stimulus, there was no talk about sustaining jobs for women. Rather than creating more child care jobs and making life more affordable for working women, Premier McGuinty gave away more than \$2 billion in corporate tax cuts. Rather than creating home care jobs and improving care for older women, Premier McGuinty added 8% to basic purchases. Instead of making life better for women and their families, why did the Premier team up with Stephen Harper?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to repeat a story which I think I've told in this House but bears repetition. When I visited the Cabbagetown Youth Centre and announced, together with Minister Matthews, our increase in the Ontario child benefit, I sat beside a mom there who told me that her family income was \$16,000 for herself, her mother-in-law, her husband and two kids. She said that what she wanted more than anything else is just enough money to put her six-year-old into swimming lessons. My friend says that going from \$50 to \$92 a month per child is not significant. I can tell you in the eyes of that particular mom, \$42 more a month per child represented a good deal. It's not everything, and we need to find a way to do more, but I like to think, especially given our economic circumstances, that it represents a progressive step forward on behalf of all Ontario families, helping those who most need the help.

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?
Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Hamilton East knows the rules very clearly.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm back in my seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I didn't appreciate the look that you directed at the Speaker.

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier, of course: I'm sure the Premier knows this, but women earn 29% less than what men make, and this recession is making things worse for women.

The budget missed an opportunity; an opportunity to create jobs for women and make life more affordable for families. Major investments in child care and home care could create jobs, improve women's working conditions and reduce the stress on their families, particularly those families that have children and those families that are taking care of older parents and loved ones.

Instead, what did families get from this Premier? They got an 8% tax hike. Why did the Premier's budget ignore the jobs crisis faced by the women in this province and instead whack them with a tax hike?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I've talked about some of the supports we put in place for vulnerable families, which are overwhelmingly led by women.

I want to talk just a little bit about two areas of public service which happen to be dominated by women. At a time of negative growth, we're going to increase funding in health care by 4.5%. At a time of negative growth, we're going to increase funding for education by 6.8%. Overwhelmingly, in education and health care, when you talk about teachers and nurses, you are talking about women. Those are the kinds of professions and public services that we continue to come to the table for. Those nurses and those teachers do so much good work on behalf of the rest of us, we thought it was absolutely essential to continue to make those kinds of investments, because ultimately we're talking about public services that benefit all of our families.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This budget failed women in other ways. For example, there's no mention at all in the budget about closing the pay gap. Women earn 71 cents for every dollar that men earn, and the Ontario government is in fact contributing to this problem. Dalton McGuinty owes women workers at government-funded child care and community centres \$156 million in pay arrears that they won in a court settlement. Why is the Premier dragging his feet on pay equity in this province for those women?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to agree at the outset that there is always more to be done. But I think Ontarians are on to the magnitude of this economic challenge before us.

I'm proud of our budget. I know it's not the easiest budget in the world to come to grips with; we are moving towards a single sales tax. But given our circumstances, the fact that we found a way to improve supports for our most vulnerable families which, again, are disproportionately led, in single-parent cases, by women, and the fact that we've found significant new dollars for health care

and for education, including for home care, I think speaks to our values.

These aren't NDP values, these aren't Conservative values; these are values of the people of Ontario, who are asking us to ensure that as we build a strong economy, we build a more caring Ontario. I think we've taken a good step towards that objective.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Frank Klees: To the Premier: The Premier admitted yesterday that he was wrong when he suggested to a group of business leaders in Ottawa that he may not implement next year's minimum wage increase that was clearly set out in the budgetary papers just a few days ago. What is not clear is what the Premier meant. Did he mean that he was wrong to promise the wage increase in the first place, given the tough economic times, or that he was wrong to suggest he was willing to break a budgetary commitment? Would the Premier please clarify which of the wrongs he prefers?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: What this government has done on the broader poverty agenda: For instance, we are increasing the child benefit this year. We were originally going to raise it in 2011 to the level we put it at last week; we looked at that, reviewed it and moved it forward. That is absolutely the right thing to do.

I can tell the member opposite that the wrong thing to do is to freeze the minimum wage for eight years, which he and his party did. That does not benefit the economy. That does not help people in these times. The policy which has raised the minimum wage was laid out in 2007, and I'm proud that the minimum wage is going up today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm disappointed that the Premier chose not to answer a very direct question which was directed to him about his sense of what a commitment is. I would simply now go back to the Premier, and I would ask him this question. In light of the fact that in the past he has made a commitment not to raise taxes, and this budget includes an HST provision that will raise taxes on every man, woman and child in this province for years to come, would the Premier tell us this: What is it that guides the Premier in his decisions when it comes to which commitments to break and which commitments to keep?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: What guides this Premier is what's in the best interest of the people of Ontario. It's about balance. It's about a very substantial corporate tax cut. I'll be curious to see if that member votes against it, because just last week they were calling for it. It's about a very substantial personal income tax cut—

Interjections.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: They're getting nervous because they know what they've said.

I'm going to see if that member is going to vote against a \$10.6-billion personal tax cut when this budget comes up for a vote.

It is about balance. It is about building a compassionate society. It's about building a competitive tax system to lead Ontario to that next generation of growth. I'm with Jim Flaherty and the federal Conservatives: This is the right deal for Ontario and for Canada.

MINIMUM WAGE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Premier. Here are some facts: In Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, two thirds of minimum wage earners are women; in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, women earn 29% less than men; in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, racialized women earn 36% less than men and aboriginal women earn 54% less.

Since the Premier has flip-flopped on the minimum wage, will this government put in writing that it will immediately raise the minimum wage to \$10.25 an hour as a first step to bringing hundreds of thousands of Ontario women over the poverty line?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In 2007, we laid out a plan to raise the minimum wage; today, it goes up to \$9.50. I would remind the member that we've raised it six times, and I would remind the member opposite she voted against that on each and every opportunity she had.

As the Premier said earlier, there's always more to do. I am proud that we're moving the Ontario child benefit forward. That's why a diverse number of people in the poverty agenda that have an interest in women's issues have supported this budget, have recognized that it's the right step. I wish you would have voted for those increases to the minimum wage. Perhaps you'll have another chance down the road.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The Minister of Finance knows very well he's talking about the budget and not the increase to the minimum wage, which we are asking to accelerate.

Women outnumber men in nine of the 10 lowest-paying occupations in Canada. Young women graduating from high school earn 27% less than male high school graduates. The pay gap continues in Ontario into retirement, with 42% of elderly women being poor, and yet, the McGuinty government can't seem to make up its mind whether it's for a living wage or against it.

I repeat, will the minister commit in this House to immediately raise the minimum wage to \$10.25 an hour, and put it in writing? That's the poverty line.

1100

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'm proud that today the minimum wage is going up to \$9.50, and it will go to \$10.25 next year.

I would like to read just a few quotes. Here's what Pat Capponi, of the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction, said: "This budget has moved the bar forward on housing, tax credits, and child benefits in ways that will make a tangible difference in the lives of many Ontarians." John Stapleton, of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives: "This is a budget that favours low-income

people and the working poor most of all because when you look at all the benefits, it is clear that the working poor and those with low wages are going to be better off as a result of the budget measures."

As the Premier said, there is more to do. This budget is in fact about helping those that need our help the most. I am proud of this government's record. I am proud to have voted in favour, six times now, of an increase—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Bruce Crozier: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities: In a time when the manufacturing sector is facing a contraction, more and more people are required to transition into a new job. In my community, recently laid-off workers are making the transition back to school and into new jobs.

A unique partnership between the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, the CAW in Windsor and St. Clair College is helping recently laid-off workers from Ford make the move into new jobs easily and quickly. Laid-off workers are now training at a variety of occupations, including industrial maintenance mechanic, registered practical nurse, heavy equipment operator or paramedic. I'm pleased to report things are going well and the first class has already graduated. In fact, that class, made up entirely of Ford workers, received the highest class average.

What steps has the minister taken to ensure that Ontario's workers will have the skills and training they need—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. John Milloy: I thank the member for his question and I want to thank him for the example he raises, where a partnership between TCU, CAW and the local post-secondary institutions is paying off for workers in the Windsor area.

I'm very proud that our government has made ensuring that we have the most highly skilled and highly educated workforce a priority. Through the Reaching Higher investments, we have 100,000 more people in our colleges and universities and 50,000 more apprentices. In last spring's budget, the finance minister introduced a \$2-billion skills-to-jobs action plan which resulted in our Second Career program, which complements a variety of programs offered by Employment Ontario, which helps people re-enter the workforce either directly or through training and retraining programs. We are there for Ontarians who are looking for a new job.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Bruce Crozier: To the minister: The recent budget included money for economic development, infrastructure spending and the green economy. However, these initiatives will only be successful if we have the people with the right skills to see these investments through to success.

We know that in order to compete in the global economy, we need to have a well-educated workforce that can adapt to ever-changing demands in the workplace. As we shift to a knowledge-based economy, it will be imperative for workers to access the education, training and skills upgrades that they need to remain competitive. This will require a concerted effort among all levels of government to ensure that people have the resources and tools they need to get the skills required to compete, and as we emerge from the economic downturn, we need to be sure that they have those skills.

Would the minister tell the House what the government's doing to expand skills training to ensure workers are equipped—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. John Milloy: I was very proud that the Minister of Finance's budget last week complemented the programs that were outlined in the 2008 budget. It included an investment of \$750 million over the next two years in the area of skills training and support for the unemployed.

We will be investing \$90 million over two years to expand literacy and basic skills training—just one example. This will help up to 13,000 people per year, and I think members realize how important it is to provide that foundational training for workers as they want to re-enter the workforce or enter a training program.

For young people, we are increasing spending on summer jobs for students by 57%, or \$32 million. We know how valuable these work experiences are, and this investment means that over 100,000 young people will find jobs this summer, with targeted resources for youth in high-needs neighbourhoods and greater—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Minister of Finance: Much of Ontario's manufacturing and processing, our farming, forestry, fishing and mining have been devastated of late. Your budget speech announced a 16.7% tax cut for manufacturing and processing, but it's not in the budget.

Minister, people take you at your word. Our farming, automotive and US Steel sectors and the jobs they support needed this tax cut yesterday. The new fiscal year starts tomorrow, but your tax cut is not there. Minister, why did you not include your announced tax cut in your actual budget for the coming year? There's no tax cut for manufacturing.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'd invite the member to look at the budget again, because it's there. It's quite clear.

Let me tell you what Ian Howcroft, the vice-president of the Ontario division of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters said: "Overall we're very pleased with today's budget, it addresses many of our long standing issues and priorities. I think that it shows that the government was listening. We're particularly pleased with

regards to the harmonization of the GST and PST, we've been advocating that for a long, long time. We're also very pleased with the announced reduction in the corporate tax from 12% down to 10% so I think that is a very positive step for Ontario manufacturers, which ultimately will help the whole economy and all Ontario residents."

This balanced package, which balanced the interests of all parts of the province, is in fact in the best interests of manufacturers, farmers, fishermen, logging and all industries in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'll repeat: Those touted tax cuts are not in the budget. You're starting tomorrow, and in your budget speech you indicated small businesses are the backbone of the economy. Your speech announced a tax cut for small business and a general corporate income tax cut as well. However, you didn't put them in the budget. They are not in the 2009 budget. I'm getting calls from small business. Why would you mislead business?

Minister, the fiscal year starts tomorrow. You say you're going to announce these tax cuts in a future budget for July 1, 2010. Will you explain to those people losing their jobs why your announced tax cuts in your recent budget speech are not in this coming year's budget?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'm delighted to hear that the member opposite wants to do it faster, because your leader says this is the wrong plan.

I won't occupy the House's time. I'd refer the member to page 16, paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. I would refer him to chapter 3 in the budget, which gives the detailed breakdown. There are about 70-odd pages on this. I would refer the member to the budget bill—you really should read those bills—and the changes to the corporate tax act that are included in that.

It's a shame that the official opposition hasn't read the budget bill. It's a shame they haven't read the budget, because these tax cuts for businesses—

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: It's a shame you can't tell the truth.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Kitchener-Waterloo will withdraw the comment she just made, please.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Ten seconds.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The members opposite have been calling for these corporate tax cuts. We're doing it. What they haven't called for is a balanced package that aims to help all Ontarians, the lowest-income Ontarians as well as our businesses—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France G  linas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Sant   et des Soins de longue dur  e.

Red Cross home care workers are on the picket lines right now in Peterborough. These SEIU workers, among 3,000 across Ontario, are striking because of substandard working conditions, a direct result of this government's failure to properly fund home care. The vast majority of home care workers, to the tune of 95%, are women who are trying to feed their families and survive off wages which keep them hovering at the poverty line. What does the minister say to these hard-working home care women who are asking for nothing else but a living wage?

Hon. David Caplan: I thank the member for the question. I know that there is a negotiation which is going on between the Red Cross and the SEIU. I trust that both parties are making efforts to conclude a new collective agreement. I know the Ministry of Labour mediator has been assisting the parties at the bargaining table and does remain available to provide further assistance.

I can tell the member, in contrast to some of the comments she made in her question, that in fact home care funding in this province has increased by \$573 million, a 47% increase in funding under this government. That has meant that 220,000 more Ontarians are receiving home care since the year 2003.

1110

These kinds of increases, this kind of support, have been consistently opposed by members in her caucus and by that member in particular. I would encourage this member to support the investment we are making in home care, because it provides vital services to Ontarians requiring that care.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: In last week's budget, the government gifted business with a \$2-billion tax cut, but there was not one penny in the budget for the home care system. Is it this government's plan to keep the home care system running on the backs of unpaid and undervalued women?

Hon. David Caplan: No, there's not one penny; there are several million of them which are going to home care. In fact, we have unveiled a home care strategy, which will be coming in the fall and which will focus on the quality of care that residents will be receiving. That's why we're working with both parties and hope to resolve the dispute that they have on reaching a collective agreement.

But the effort this government has made—for example, a \$30-million personal support worker stabilization strategy, increasing the base minimum wage for qualified PSWs from \$9.65 an hour to \$12.50 an hour. That's why we've provided improved compensation for travel costs and for travel time, why we've introduced service volume targets and training initiatives.

It is part of a comprehensive plan which in fact is providing more care, so that Ontarians are getting better care and higher-quality care. It would be helpful if the member opposite and her colleagues would support these efforts to provide better care to Ontarians, because I know they are greatly—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I have a question today for the Minister of Community and Social Services. At one point in Ontario's history, it was not only socially acceptable but even encouraged to lock individuals with disabilities in facilities, facilities that were often located outside of communities and where the individuals were separated from family and friends. Thankfully, Ontarians now reject that idea. We, as a collective society, endeavour to treat individuals with disabilities with the respect and the dignity that they deserve.

Steven Muir, a constituency assistant of mine, is a self-advocate for Community Living, and we keep each other updated. Minister, would you update Steven Muir, this House, and Ontarians today on the status of the remaining three facilities in Ontario?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, let me thank the member from Oakville for his personal contribution to an issue and a topic that is tremendously important. I am proud to stand up this House today, as the Minister of Community and Social Services, and announce that today marks the end of institutionalized care for individuals with disabilities in this province. The doors are literally closing on the last three facilities in Ontario, and tomorrow we begin a new era for this province's developmental services community.

I know it is a rare occasion to have members of this House stand up in their places and reach across the floor and thank their colleagues, but this is one of those unique moments. Despite our political differences, each party in this House contributed to this day. The Conservatives and the NDP both closed facilities during their time in office, and I am incredibly—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's clearly a defining moment in Ontario's history. I know that families across this province are thankful that we're all embracing community-based care. I have a constituent, Dianne Garrels-Munro of Community Living Ontario; she's also a very strong supporter of community care.

Now, I don't want to minimize the importance of this day, but I feel that in the midst of the economic turmoil we're all experiencing, it's important to balance compassion with discipline. Minister, would you advise this House what the government is doing with the money that we're no longer spending on the operation and maintenance of those three facilities?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, a very good question. We have invested nearly \$276 million to close the last three institutions. The funding previously used to support residents living in these three facilities is being used to support these individuals living in the community. In 2008-09, the ministry invested over \$108 million in operating funding to support residents who have moved to the community as a result of the closure of the facilities.

In addition, the ministry has invested over \$100 million in one-time capital funding to create new homes in the community for former facility residents.

Closing the remaining facilities is not about cost savings. We are closing the three remaining facilities so that residents can participate more fully in their communities in our society. Each and every one of us should be proud our province is moving in this direction. Tomorrow really is—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Mr. Bill Murdoch: My question is to Minister of Health Promotion. Some time ago, I read a petition in the House, signed by many people from all across Ontario, asking the government to enforce regulations in the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. You informed me in a letter that this was the job of the local public health units, so I sent your letter on to the local public health units. They got back to me and said, “Yes, our job is to enforce the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, but we’ve been discouraged and told not to” by your government on reserves, where these smoke shacks are.

So, Madam Minister, I would like you to explain to the House, who enforces these laws that we make in this House?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I’m going to refer the question to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I want to thank the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for the question. I know that he’s not asking us to direct the police. I can reassure him and everyone in this House that the RCMP, the OPP, the municipal police services, and our First Nations police services work closely together in trying to solve this contraband problem, with some success. I look forward to talking about the successes in my supplemental.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: There’s some miscommunication here. The minister informed me that the district health unit did it. This has nothing to do with the police. They’ve never come into this. I have the minister’s letter right here, saying that the district health unit would do this.

Madam Minister, you told me this. I asked them, and they said your government told them not to do it. So all I’m asking you, since it’s under your ministry—and I hope that you can answer this—is, who am I supposed to believe? You’re telling me one person is doing it. They’re telling me they’re not doing it. Who’s telling the truth around here?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The truth is that in 2008, the seizure of contraband cigarettes was up 46% from 2007. This year, the trend hasn’t changed. Our policing men and women have seized over 25 million cigarettes and over 10 tonnes of fine-cut tobacco and related products.

I want to assure the member, and all the members in the House, that our police services are working closely

together. We understand that there’s a problem. There is more to do. We continue to address this concern.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. The honourable member knows that we don’t deal with points of order during question period. You can talk to the table and file the necessary paperwork.

The member from Thornhill.

TAXATION

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is to the Minister of Finance. We’ve now had several days to reflect on the budget, and there are a range of questions brought on by hasty, half-thought-out measures which are quickly bubbling to the surface.

My question is this: Why is the minister throwing roadblocks up for the resale of homes? The largest single purchase of most people’s lives, and the one thing that most people can claim represents their savings, is their home, one of the items hardest hit by your attack. Instead of offering a helping hand, the minister wants 8% slapped onto inspections, real estate fees, legal fees, and moving—thousands of dollars more than now. Why is he taxing the resale home market?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, we are providing a \$10.6-billion tax cut for individuals and families to help them adjust, in addition to the transition payment that we have spoken about. This tax cut for individuals is designed to assist all families in this economy, and it is designed to ensure that the economy grows faster in the future, which is what we really need to see happen in terms of spurring the sale both of new and existing homes.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Let’s talk about how far that \$1,000 goes. The average cost of a home in my riding of Thornhill, for example—a three-bedroom, two-bathroom house—is about \$500,000. These homes are not mansions; they are where hard-working families live. People have gone without to build a future and have realized the dream of owning their own home. On that \$500,000 home, my constituents will pay about \$2,200 more in taxes at sale, and \$2,200 is a lot of money, especially to those who have spent a lifetime saving to buy a home.

Does the minister care about families aiming higher, about seniors preserving value? When are this minister and his government going to get off their duffs and start helping good Ontarians?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I’d just ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment, please.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Withdrawn.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would remind the member opposite that resale homes are exempt from the new single sales tax. I would remind the member that the balance of initiatives, including the most generous new home tax credit in the country, help offset the challenges that people will face. But most importantly, the balance

of the package, the personal tax cuts, the corporate tax cuts, the investment in people of very modest means, will help ensure that this economy moves to the next generation of growth, the generation of growth that will see more people buy their first homes, that will see more people move up.

Finally, I would remind the member opposite that we've increased the senior citizens' property tax credit quite considerably, and that member and his party voted against that measure.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The question is to the Premier. This government's budget left 22,000 child care spaces across Ontario on the chopping block. It leaves moms like Chrystal from Hamilton in limbo on a child care wait-list for months before she finally received a response. Chrystal is 25 years old and has a two-year-old son. With OSAP payments, rent, bills, food and other bare necessities to cover on her single income, their family is just making it by. Now she can't even be sure that one of those limited child care spaces that she is counting on is going to continue to exist.

What does the Premier say to Chrystal and tens of thousands of moms like her who are facing increased uncertainty because this government has yet again failed to invest in child care?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think it's very important to recognize that we have made tremendous progress over the past number of years when it comes to child care in this province: 22,000 new spaces, more families receiving subsidies. We have made a commitment to the youngest people in this province and we remain firmly committed to that.

The issue around the loss of federal funding is clearly one that concerns me and all of us tremendously. This federal government cancelled the early learning and child care agreement; that cost Ontario families billions of dollars. We are determined to do whatever we can to keep all of the spaces in this province open, but we are calling on our federal partners to step up to the plate and be part of child care in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The one thing the government could have done is to have actually funded the spaces. That's what the government could have done. Regardless of how the minister tries to spin it, all the McGuinty government did for child care in its budget was cowardly pass the buck to the federal government, which the minister just did, on a provincial responsibility. She knows it's a provincial responsibility, and she turned her back, instead, on the working moms of this province.

Adequate, affordable, licensed, not-for-profit child care can reduce poverty and create employment. Child care is a critical investment that the McGuinty budget

flat-out ignored. As the Toronto Star puts it, "Expanded daycare would create jobs for child care workers, enable parents to retrain for better jobs so they can participate in the knowledge economy that Ontario's future depends on, and help single mothers lift their families out of poverty through work."

With so many moms and kids waiting, how can this government continue to ignore the social and economic benefits of child care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think that the leader of the third party and our government completely agree on the importance of child care, but it's important, I think, this time, that we get some facts straight. There are some grossly exaggerated numbers that are being floated around, so let's put this challenge in perspective, recognizing that this really is a challenge.

We spend in this province close to \$900 million on child care. Approximately two thirds of that money comes from the provincial government. The money we're talking about that is in jeopardy represents just over 7% of our total child care budget. The numbers that are being floated about do not reflect that reality.

As I say, we are working very hard to resolve this issue. It is a serious problem. We are asking all members of this House and all citizens—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Many Ontarians and their families have been caught in the middle of the global and economic financial storm. Yet, despite this predicament, more and more Ontarians continue to rely on vital services like health care. In last week's budget, this government committed to a \$42.6-billion health care investment. Still, the media coverage I read the next day focused mainly on the economic or taxation aspects of the budget. I know Ontarians want to hear more about what this budget means for health care, so I ask the minister how this budget will ensure that the good people of this province will continue to receive the quality health care services they deserve and have come to rely on.

Can the minister assure Ontarians that health care is still a top priority for this government?

Hon. David Caplan: I'm glad that my honourable colleague has asked this question. It gives me a chance to reassert that we are committed, on this side of the House, to protecting our province's health care system and to making progress on our key priorities.

Our government believes in a strong, universal health care system with low wait times and increased access to family health services. That's why we're investing more in this important sector. In 2009-10, our government is investing \$13.2 billion more than in 2003-04. That's a 45% increase in funding for our health care system.

For five years, we've made significant progress in health care, and we're going to keep doing more. In our 2009 budget, our government is taking action to make

our economy competitive and to protect Ontario families. That's essential, because our ability to strengthen the health care services that Ontarians rely upon depends on a strong, growing and competitive economy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Minister, but I want to ask an important question. Like this government and like many Ontario families, hospitals are doing everything they can to thrive in these difficult economic times. In the 2008-09 budget, hospitals in Ontario were promised that for 2009-10, they would receive a base funding increase of 2.1%. But many are worried, including hospitals in my riding such as the Ottawa Hospital, Bruyère Continuing Care and the Royal Ottawa. They want to know whether, with the economy taking a turn for the worse, the government will be able to guarantee this much-needed funding increase.

Can the Minister of Health tell this House what this government is doing to help Ontario's hospitals confront the economic challenge? Will they receive the 2.1% increase, as promised?

Hon. David Caplan: The government is protecting hospital funding during an economic crisis. As the finance minister laid out in his budget, I'm proud to say that we plan to meet our commitment and provide hospitals with a 2.1% base funding increase. All included, all programs' hospital funding will increase by 4.7% in 2009-10.

Tom Closson, president of the Ontario Hospital Association, has called the 2009 economic plan, and I quote, "a positive budget for Ontario's hospitals and patients." He said, and I quote: "By protecting hospital funding in 2009-10, the government is positioning hospitals to maintain access to high quality health services in the challenging year ahead."

Other Ontario hospitals have echoed this sentiment. Murray Martin, Hamilton Health Sciences' CEO, called this base increase, and I quote, "very, very good news" for—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is also to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, you would be well aware of the underfunding of hospitals in Ontario's high-growth areas. This includes the GTA 905 and some of my neighbours. Our Central East Local Health Integration network continues to have major hospital funding gaps. Compared to the provincial average, the funding gap is \$226 per person. Citizens are concerned that our community hospitals—and I should say that the headline from the doctors in my community is, "ER Cuts Would Devastate Clarington"; that's according to the doctor.

1130

Minister, will you and/or your government end the funding gap and give fair allocation to our hospitals in Durham?

Hon. David Caplan: It's always hard to know from the Progressive Conservative Party which kind of question—earlier today, we had the cut questions; now, we have the spend questions.

The member refers to the Lakeridge hospital. I know there have been a lot of rumours going around in the community. There was a recent gathering there. The hospital has quite clearly stated to the community: "There has been absolutely no discussion at the board about an emergency department closure" at the Lakeridge Health Bowmanville site. The hospital gets about 32,000 emergency visits each year, and with the exceptional growth expected in Clarington, Bowmanville is sure to see the number of patient visits expand.

That's why I'm so thrilled about the commitment that this finance minister made in the budget to an additional \$40 million in growth funding to our hospitals which have experienced it.

It would have been possible for this member, when he had the privilege to serve on this side of the House, to make those kinds of investments. Regrettably, he and his colleagues did not see fit to do so. But this government is taking the appropriate—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. John O'Toole: Minister, on Sunday afternoon, in the rain, people stood in support of the hospital—despite what your comment is. Dr. Tony Stone and others are seeking assurances that Bowmanville's hospital will keep the level of services in the future that they currently provide today—that isn't asking for more; it's asking for the same—such services as internal medicine, general surgery, and intensive care. This is essential to our rapidly growing community of over 80,000 residents.

We've been advised that there are no plans to close the emergency department. But what will happen next year? This is actually referred to as death by a thousand cuts.

Minister, will you stand in your place and tell the citizens of my riding that Bowmanville's hospital will have the funding they need to continue vital services such as internal medicine? Will you tell Durham riding that the ER and other essential services will continue in our community and not be withdrawn?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, at Lakeridge Health—more than \$54 million in base increase funding since 2003-04. That's a 26% increase that this member has voted against each and every time the budget policies of this government have been debated and voted on in the House.

The chair of the hospital's board of trustees called the rumours that the member talked about here in his earlier question about the changes in the hospital "unfortunate and unnecessary." The hospital has stated its commitment to a vibrant hospital in Bowmanville.

I think as I've indicated in this House, the Ontario Hospital Association has called upon this government to meet its commitments to base funding increases. In fact, in his 2009 budget speech, and as will be debated on and

voted on in the House, this minister and this government have delivered on that commitment.

I hope that this member opposite will vote in support of Lakeridge hospital and the kind of necessary funding that is going to be provided to them.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est également pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

Yesterday, referring to the Sharkey report, the minister said, "We're bringing all of the partners to the table to enhance that care...." On the same day the minister was boasting about the implementation team led by Shirlee Sharkey, four of the participating unions announced they are pulling out. They see the process as a distraction that is not going to achieve minimum care and staffing standards—a waste of their time.

Minister, the vast majority of workers in long-term-care facilities are women. The majority of residents in long-term-care homes are women. These women are not getting the care they deserve. Why did the McGuinty government abandon these women and not fund a minimum standard of care?

Hon. David Caplan: I must tell you that we asked a very noted expert, Shirlee Sharkey, to take a look at the long-term-care system in the province of Ontario. Specifically, the member opposite points to hours of care. Shirlee Sharkey found that there was no evidence to support the minimum standard of care that the member opposite and some of the unions, quite frankly, have alluded to as what they desire to see. In fact, she said that we should be looking at the individual needs of residents in long-term-care homes and be able to develop a care plan to meet those individual needs. I think that's very much the right kind of approach.

Our union partners—of course, we've engaged them. We welcome them. We want them to understand that we share a common goal here: making sure that our most vulnerable residents in the province of Ontario get the care that they need. We hope, and I hope, that they will come back to the table, that they will work constructively. It has been the approach of this government to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1500.

ESTIMATES

Hon. Jim Watson: I have a message from the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor signed by his own hand.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending 31 March 2009 and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DICK ILLINGWORTH

Mr. Frank Klees: I rise today to pay tribute to a legendary public servant, a great Canadian and a very good personal friend, Dick Illingworth, who died on Sunday, March 29, 2009, at the age of 92.

The Second World War veteran came to live in the town of Aurora in 1954. Dick Illingworth had a great distinction: to serve as aide-de-camp to four Ontario Lieutenant Governors. He was also executive assistant to Ontario PC cabinet Minister John White.

Dick began his career in municipal politics in 1965, when he was elected councillor in the town of Aurora. From 1969-73, Dick Illingworth was His Worship the Mayor of Aurora, a role he assumed for a second time in 1983 for two more years.

In 1985, Dick began his career in journalism, which spanned newspaper, radio and television. His news and current affairs program on Aurora Cable TV, known as *Our Town*, was a must-see. He also wrote numerous columns and stories for a number of York region publications, and for last eight years wrote for the *Auroran*, which is owned, published and edited by his very good friend Ron Wallace.

His many contributions to York region and the town of Aurora were recognized last year when Dick Illingworth was presented with Ontario's Senior Achievement Award by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, the Honourable David Onley.

His brilliant legacy of public service to Aurora and York region is the enduring testament to the memory of this great citizen of Canada and Ontario.

On behalf of all members of this House, I extend my sincerest condolences to Dick's wife, Dorothy Clark-McClure, and his family.

TYLER CROOKS

Mr. Peter Kormos: Corporal Tyler Kevin Crooks, 3rd Battalion, November Company, Royal Canadian Regiment, based at the Canadian Forces base in Petawawa, celebrated his 24th birthday on March 20 this year, and it was the same day that he was killed while on duty in the Afghanistan mission.

Tyler Crooks received a hero's welcome when his body was repatriated to his hometown of Port Colborne last Saturday. Thousands and thousands of people lined the roadways. Many of them knew Tyler. It's a small town. If they didn't know Tyler, they knew his parents. But even those who didn't know Tyler knew they had lost a brother and knew that they were welcoming a hero back home to his final resting place.

This young man in this short lifetime touched many lives with his loyalty, his constant smiling, his wit and good-natured teasing. He had a large extended family that included many aunts, uncles, cousins and family friends.

Part of the DeWitt Carter Public School alumni in Port Colborne; upon his grade 8 graduation, he was co-valedictorian with his close friend Brandon Chevalier.

Hard work and diligence were the hallmarks of Corporal Tyler Crooks's time at Lakeshore Catholic High School. He led his lacrosse team to capture SOSSA and OFSAA championships.

Hockey was one of his passions, as it is for so many young people down in Niagara region, beginning with minor leagues in Port Colborne and Welland, eventually graduating to the juniors with Dunnville and Port Colborne. Tyler continued playing in a military hockey league. He was an avid Toronto Maple Leafs fan, which was always a source of fierce but friendly competition between Tyler and his godfather, Greg Couture, an avid Montreal Canadiens fan.

Tyler was a graduate of the police foundations program at Niagara College in Welland. To support himself and pay for his tuition, he worked at JTL machine shop in Port Colborne, where he forged many long-lasting relationships with his co-workers.

He was an outdoors enthusiast, enjoying the cottage and hunting and fishing with his family and many friends.

He leaves behind his brother, Tage; Alfred "Alphie" Crooks and Karen Crooks; and his grandmother, Margaret Wagner. Grandparents Archie and Rose Crooks and Kevin Wagner are deceased already.

I ask this assembly to join with me in paying tribute to this brave young man, a Canadian hero. I tell you, his passing has honoured us, because we witnessed one of our own perform at the highest level of courage and sacrifice. I ask this assembly to have a moment of silence in recognition of Corporal Tyler Kevin Crooks and his great sacrifice.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): If I may, I'd like to go to the statement from the member from Niagara, and then we'll observe a moment of silence.

TYLER CROOKS

Mr. Kim Craiton: It is also with a sad heart that I rise today to talk to this House about Corporal Tyler Crooks, a brave soldier who served our country with pride and valour and distinction. I also want to talk about those he loved and those who loved him.

When a soldier dies in service to our country, we all feel a deep pain of sorrow, sadness and regret, no more so than this past week in Port Colborne, as the honourable member from Welland has expressed to this House. That pain reaches out across our neighbourhoods, into nearby communities and across our great province—and it has also in the community of Niagara Falls.

It is so sad; this native of Port Colborne, Corporal Tyler Crooks, and his beloved fiancée of six years, 23-year-old Kelly Maxwell of Niagara Falls, were planning their wedding and had a very bright future ahead of them—alas, it's not to be.

The entire Maxwell family mourns this terrible loss, for it affects them so personally. Our hearts are heavy for their sorrow and their pain.

Tyler's time on this earth was short, but our memories and those of his fiancée, Kelly, and the entire Maxwell family, will last forever.

On behalf of my community, I would like to express my deepest sympathy to the Crooks and Maxwell families.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask all members and our guests to join me as we observe a moment of silence in memory of Corporal Tyler Crooks.

The House observed a moment's silence.

BOWMANVILLE HOSPITAL

Mr. John O'Toole: I rise in the House to congratulate my community for the successful rally on Sunday March 29, in support of Bowmanville's hospital. Pouring rain couldn't keep hundreds of hospital supporters from the outdoor rally at the town hall. We heard first-hand of the importance of our hospital from speakers representing a complete cross-section of the community, from very young to very old, from professionals to citizens at large.

I'd like to thank, specifically, Dr. Tony Stone, who has been a lead in this fight to save the hospital; Dr. Ben Fuller; Cory Kuipers; Frank Stapleton; Michael Patrick; a young member of the community, Steve Kay, who spoke eloquently about his concern for the hospital where he was born; Jennifer Bowman; Gerry Johnston, the chair of the hospital foundation; and all those who spoke so eloquently about Lakeridge Health Bowmanville and what it means to them.

Volunteers, nurses, doctors, leaders in the business community, elected representatives and patients all agree the provincial government must not allow any reduction in services at Bowmanville's hospital site.

All of Clarington's 80,000 residents, their friends and their neighbours are strong advocates for the hospital in many ways, as volunteers and contributors to the foundation. Whether we are speaking to health care administrators or to the government, our message could be no more clear: no more cuts to the Bowmanville hospital.

1510

I would urge Minister Caplan, after my question today and his rather high-handed response—as if it didn't really matter, that they were pouring lots of money in—that we aren't equally funded, and we want to work with the minister for Lakeridge Health's future—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

EPILEPSY

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: As many members of the Legislature may know, March is Epilepsy Awareness Month. Epilepsy is a neurological disorder that affects over 300,000 Canadians from coast to coast. Here in Toronto, there are over 40,000 people living with epilepsy, and it affects one in every 100 school children.

March 26 was Purple Day, a day where people from around the world are asked to wear purple in support for those living with epilepsy. Started just last year, Purple Day has already spread as a grassroots movement all around the world. This year, provincial landmarks like the Big Nickel in Sudbury, Niagara Falls and the CN Tower here in Toronto were illuminated in purple to mark this important occasion.

Today in the Legislature, Epilepsy Ontario, along with the Margaret Maye Epilepsy Initiative, has been hosting information sessions for MPPs about the important work being done to raise awareness about epilepsy in Ontario.

I would like to acknowledge Epilepsy of Durham Region, Halton-Peel, the city of Toronto, York region and all the many other experts in epilepsy who are here joining us today.

I would in particular like to thank Epilepsy Ontario and Ms. Margaret Maye, without whom this event would not have been possible.

I encourage members of this House to take the time to learn more about epilepsy at Queen's Park today.

In conclusion, I would like to ask for unanimous consent for members of the Legislature to wear the purple ribbon in the Legislature today in recognition of Epilepsy Awareness Month.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise today and I want to do my statement on the closure of the three regional centres that the minister, in answer to a question today, made comments on. Today is the day they actually closed, and that's actually the end of all the institutions that we have in the province. I know there's been strong support from Community Living Ontario to move in this direction, and I know that all three governments have been involved in it.

I want to put on the record today one of the things that has bothered me. And I'm glad the minister actually put out this press release. It's something worth saving, because time will tell whether or not this process has been a success. There certainly is an issue out there with the amount of money that's available for people with mental health issues and whether the group home setting is the appropriate correction for this, and time will tell that as well.

But I do want to say that in Orillia and in my riding of Simcoe North, the Huronia Regional Centre, originally the Ontario Hospital School, has been part of the culture of that community. It's been a great employer since 1876 in our community, up to 2,000 residents at one time, and I just want to thank all those people, all the families who had their children in these facilities and the doctors, nurses, the staffing, all the people who made Orillia and area a better community. I appreciate that and thank you all for this opportunity to make a statement today.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I was pleased to learn that the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs has recently signed the federal-provincial Growing Forward agreement on behalf of Ontario. This is an important step to completing this program that farmers in my area have been waiting to hear about. The federal, provincial and territorial governments signed a framework agreement last July, which guided the development of the Growing Forward suite of programs. The agreement commits funding, over five years, for non-business risk management cost-shared programs across the country.

The federal and Ontario governments focused on three goals: (1) a competitive and innovative sector; (2) a sector that contributes to society's priorities; and (3) a sector that is proactive in managing risks.

The major program areas discussed with agri-food partners in developing the new Growing Forward suite of programs have been environment and climate change, food safety, traceability, business development and bio-security.

I understand that the federal government and Ontario will be releasing more details about how growing forward will help Ontario farmers in the near future.

I want to thank our hard-working Minister Dombrowsky and her staff at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs for their efforts.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Kuldip Kular: As with previous budgets, this year's promises to invest heavily in skills training for workers throughout Ontario. Budget 2009 will be of particular benefit to many of my own constituents, workers confronted with the challenge of competing in an ever-changing and now weakened economy.

I'm particularly pleased that that budget 2009 allocates \$90 million to expand literacy and training programs for 13,000 people. A further \$94 million will be used to provide 15,000 newcomers the tools needed to succeed in the new economy. Our veteran workers are retraining, but we must also ensure that our youth have the opportunity to master the skills and the experience required to enter our workforce. That's why \$90 million more is being invested in summer employment opportunities for young people.

All told, the McGuinty government is investing nearly \$700 million to improve the competitiveness of our skilled workforce. This is certain to be of great assistance to workers right now and in the longer run will give Ontario a competitive edge when prosperity returns.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Ontario knows that small businesses are the backbone of the Ontario economy. They are responsible for half the employment in this province,

and we are committed to ensuring they have the tools needed to succeed.

The McGuinty Liberals recognize the hard work these men and women do on a daily basis, and the last budget created bold tax initiatives to help these businesses now and in the future by proposing \$4.5 billion in business tax relief over three years. These measures build on the tax relief already in place, such as the elimination of capital tax in 2010. That will lower business costs and add to Ontario's competitiveness in support of growing small businesses. We are also cutting the general corporate income tax rate from 14% to 10% by 2013; cutting the rate for small businesses from 5.5% to 4.5%; cutting the small business income tax rate by 18%, allowing business to invest in new staff and new technology; and eliminating the CIT small business deduction surtax, making Ontario the only Canadian jurisdiction that would eliminate this barrier for growing small businesses.

These tax-relief measures underscore the McGuinty government's commitment to Ontario businesses and the people who run them. While there's more to do, we'll continue to work hard to develop policies that nurture businesses and give them the tools to succeed in this new economy.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the March 31, 2009, report of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)9, the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

AFFORDABLE HOUSING LOGEMENTS À PRIX ABORDABLES

Hon. Jim Watson: I rise today to update members of the Legislative Assembly and the public of Ontario on the progress being made by the McGuinty government to improve Ontarians' access to affordable housing and at the same time to strengthen our economy.

Decent housing plays a crucial role in reducing poverty, and it creates a strong base from which to find a job, raise a family and strengthen the community. Our government has made substantial efforts to create more affordable housing throughout the province of Ontario.

Recently, we were very proud to announce that the province, along with the federal government, is pro-

posing to invest \$1.2 billion in social and affordable housing over the next two years. This would include more than \$700 million over the next two years for social housing rehabilitation and energy retrofits, over \$360 million to help create new affordable housing for low-income seniors and persons with disabilities, and \$175 million over the next two years to extend the Canada-Ontario affordable housing program. Through this investment, we would renovate 50,000 social housing units and build 4,500 new affordable housing units.

1520

Nous sommes convaincus que cet investissement débouchera sur la création de 23 000 emplois à court terme dans le secteur de la construction et de la rénovation, tout en améliorant la vie des personnes à faible revenu.

Tout ceci s'inscrit dans notre plan de prospérité consistant à rendre l'Ontario compétitif.

It's part of our work towards a better future for every Ontario family and every community across the province. Low-income families, single men and women, senior citizens, victims of violence, persons with developmental disabilities, those suffering from mental illness and those who struggle with homelessness all benefit from affordable housing.

Housing goes beyond providing someone with a place to live. It gives Ontarians a chance to go back to school, find employment and start a family. For example, one of the residents of Genesis Court in St. Catharines is a young woman who told us how affordable housing has changed her life. After moving to a wheelchair-accessible apartment, she is now attending school again. Soon enough, she will be able to get a job to support herself and give back to the community. Investments in affordable housing are more than mere dollars; they are investments in the dignity, pride of home and sense of community that every person in Ontario deserves.

We have also invested \$100 million through the 2008 budget that will repair about 4,000 units and help nearly 10,000 Ontarians, \$127 million for the DOOR program to help create and repair affordable housing, and \$80 million for off-reserve aboriginal housing. I had the pleasure of visiting one of these construction projects in Ottawa, at 20 Rochester Street, in the riding of Yasir Naqvi, where we were joined by my colleagues the Honourable Madeleine Meilleur; M. Jean-Marc Lalonde, le député de Glengarry—Prescott—Russell; and Mr. Phil McNeely, MPP for Ottawa—Orléans. As a result of the \$100-million investment that we made last year, we are investing \$1.8 million through Ottawa Community Housing, replacing windows and making other structural changes to update and upgrade this aging building. There, I spoke to a woman who told me, "For the first time since I've lived here, I'm not ashamed to tell people where I live."

I was very pleased to be joined at that event, along with my elected colleagues from the Legislature, by Chris Laundry, executive director of Nepean Housing; Vic Delaunay-Belleville, president, Nepean Housing; Karen Sexsmith, managing director, Co-operative

Housing Association of Eastern Ontario; Dave Lewis, manager, Cumberland Housing Corp.; Catherine Boucher, executive director, Centretown Citizens Ottawa; and Perry Rowe, executive director of the Salvation Army Ottawa Booth Centre and chair of the Alliance to End Homelessness.

In addition, we are delivering close to 35,000 rent supplements that will help make rent more affordable to Ontario families. In our poverty reduction strategy, which was also highlighted in Minister Duncan's budget, we've committed \$5 million per year to the provincial rent bank program. This program has prevented more than 18,700 evictions to date and helped vulnerable families stay in their homes, rather than being forced into shelters.

Our efforts don't stop here. We are working to develop a long-term affordable housing strategy for Ontario to ensure the most vulnerable among us can obtain decent, affordable shelter. Later this spring, we will start consultations across the province to hear from Ontarians how they see the future of affordable housing. I would encourage all MPPs, just as many of us did during the poverty reduction strategy, to hold our own community consultations in addition to the ones that I'm going to be hosting along with my parliamentary assistants, Mario Sergio and Carol Mitchell. We will be looking for progressive, inventive and financially sustainable ideas, ideas that make Ontario a better place to live, work and play.

Affordable housing remains a priority for our government, and that was highlighted in the fact that we are matching the federal contribution, to bring the total to \$1.2 billion over the next two years. It's extremely important for ensuring the stability and well-being of Ontario's families. After all, we believe that every Ontario family should have a safe, healthy, affordable place to call home.

I thank all of those housing providers from the municipal sector and the not-for-profit sector for their good work at the grassroots level. We look forward to partnering with them and the federal government in the years ahead. Merci beaucoup.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

Mr. John O'Toole: I acknowledge the minister today, and his response with lots of numbers, but I want to make it very clear: Our government's position has always been to provide direct rent subsidy, as opposed to these housing projects which he's outlining today.

In fact, I can recall during the time the minister has spoken about—let's look at the record of what he's done in the past five years. What I'm looking at here is a report that was issued by the Alliance to End Homelessness, a report in his own paper today. This is what they say: "The alliance's fifth annual report card reveals that the number of men, women, youth and children using homeless shelters in 2008 increased by 15.2%. There were 747 homeless families with 1,179 children (under 16 years old) last year." In summary, Perry Rowe, the chair, said, "It's an appalling, shameful situation." They have nothing to be proud about and nothing to brag about.

Add to that the dire situation announced recently in the budget. The most vulnerable, the lowest-income earners, will be the hardest hit. They will be paying on every consumption, from rent to cable TV to their cell-phone to their telephone bill to their energy; you name it, they're going to be paying 8% more. What have they done—because they know they're weak on this file. They've come out today and they've announced this great tranche of money.

I should say this: It was almost forced on them by the federal government. They're the lead share on this, and in fact they're now matching that money, shamefully matching the money. But what is it? It's another post-dated cheque. There are two years of implementation. By the time they get the paperwork done, even the contractors will be paying 8% more to refine the heating system or put in the sub-metering—oh, by the way, the sub-metering on energy has been ruled out by the Energy Board—so that these apartments, often not well-maintained under this government, are going to be paying more for energy.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: I can tell you right now they're shouting because we've touched a nerve. Why is he standing in his place today when in five years they virtually haven't done a thing? Last year there were 134 new units. I can't believe the shamefulness of this getting up today, announcing this federal money that they're going to spend in a program over two years. Most of this stuff is post-dated cheques, until after the next election. It's shameful. It's like some of the \$300 that you're going to give them in these cheques, these payoffs, will go to pay the increased rent, because all of this maintenance is going to be charged somewhere to the tenants. So I'm still concerned. I think they've got it wrong. I'm not surprised. They don't have a long-term plan.

But I can say to you that I'm more specifically concerned about the budget itself. The budget is another tax grab on the most vulnerable people—not always, but often renters—and I would say to you that on this side of the House, we're there to defend the people who are the most vulnerable in society. It seems that the Liberals have turned their backs on them once again.

There's more talk in this report, and I'm referring here to the Alliance to End Homelessness. This is what they said. I'll send the minister a copy when I'm finished speaking here, after a minute and 27 seconds. If I was to be asking the minister to do something, it would be to make a clear commitment on the number of units. In my riding of Durham, for instance, I hear this frequently and I say, "I'll raise it with the minister." So I'm raising it with you today: What is it that you're promising to Durham region today? This is a community of 600,000 people. They need to have their fair share of this funding. If you get a chance to respond to this, maybe you'll clarify the record. How much of this announcement of \$1.2 billion are you going to flow to Durham region? We see it as an issue. You've made the promise. You're the government. What's the plan? Either you're just making

an announcement or you have no plan whatsoever that I can figure out.

1530

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's an honour to rise on behalf of people like Angel Robinson. Let me tell you about Angel Robinson. Angel Robinson is a young mother of two children. She has a 13-year-old and a three-year-old. She put her name on an affordable housing list when her first child was born. Angel is still waiting for affordable housing. She gets an income on mother's allowance, on social assistance, of just over \$1,000 a month only because she has a special food allowance, and she spends almost as much—\$17 less than she receives—on her housing. She is the face of the precariously housed in Ontario. She will not be helped by this announcement one iota. She is typical of the 125,000 households—families, not individuals—that are waiting for affordable housing across Ontario as we speak; 70,000 in the greater Toronto area alone—70,000.

Now, in response to this, what do we get? We get a decrease in the funding that Dalton McGuinty has given to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. He should be depressed, not gleeful. In fact, there's a big drop of almost \$222 million, 25%, from his budget from three years ago and a 6% drop from the current year. That's his budget, and that is how much Dalton McGuinty values affordable housing. He slashed this ministry more than any other. So please, don't rise and be joyful about a cut in your own budget, Mr. Minister. That's certainly important.

This announcement will not help Angel Robinson or anybody who lives in privately rented housing. It will not help non-senior households. It will not help those who do not have disabilities. It will not help, in fact, about 90% of those in Ontario who are waiting for affordable housing.

Yes, it's a good thing that Toronto social housing will be refurbished, and it's a good thing that social housing across Ontario will be refurbished, but that accounts for about 5% of the housing need, and yet it's half of the new budget. To quote Michael Shapcott, senior policy fellow at the Wellesley Institute, he said, "People living in social housing, seniors and people with disabilities all deserve healthy and affordable homes. But so do all the other Ontarians who are struggling to keep a roof over their heads."

Compare this to Alberta. Alberta spent about 24 times more per person, about \$3 billion of provincial dollars on homelessness in its budget—Alberta of all places. Yet here we have a so-called Liberal government that is spending far, far worse than one of the most regressive Conservative governments. That's nothing to be gleeful about.

Finally, that's nothing to celebrate for the Angel Robinsons of the world; these are the faces of precarious housing in Ontario. Some 4,500 new units, and again we don't know what they mean by "affordable," because certainly we have seen this government build what it calls affordable housing in the past; housing that you

need to be making \$30,000 to \$60,000 a year to be able to afford. That's certainly not housing that's affordable for somebody on OW; that's certainly not housing that's affordable for somebody on minimum wage; and that's certainly not housing that is affordable for Angel Robinson and her two children. Will she have to wait for the second child to reach 13 before she reaches the top of that list of 125,000—and growing—in Ontario for affordable housing?

The other thing that's interesting to note is that the announcement gave an example of a Liberal riding and a housing project. I certainly hope that the housing projects are not all going to be built in Liberal ridings. Few though they may be, certainly we hope and we will follow up to make sure that they are spread across all of Ontario, and certainly spread to people like Angel Robinson.

So, in conclusion, this is not joyful news; this is a sad and shameful day for Ontario. It's a sad and shameful day for people like Angel Robinson and all of the other tens of thousands of people who are waiting for crumbs from this master's table, and crumbs is all they're getting. Crumbs is what this housing minister is giving them and hoping they'll be satisfied. They are not.

PETITIONS

ROUTE 17/174 HIGHWAY 17/174

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I have a petition that is printed in both official languages, so I will be reading the first part in French and the second part in English.

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que la route 17/174 a besoin d'être élargie à quatre voies, du chemin Trim à la route régionale Prescott-Russell 8, afin d'améliorer la sécurité routière;

« Attendu que la route 17/174 a été reconnue par le passé pour sa condition dangereuse ainsi que le taux d'accidents annuel notable;

« Attendu que cette route représente la principale voie d'accès à la capitale nationale pour la population ouvrière de Clarence-Rockland, Alfred et Plantagenet et Hawkesbury;

« Attendu que les comtés-unis de Prescott-Russell ont manifesté leur intérêt à effectuer une étude environnementale destinée à l'agrandissement de la route 17/174 en passant une résolution au conseil;

"Whereas the city of Ottawa passed a council resolution asking that either the province or the united counties of Prescott and Russell take the lead in the environmental assessments; and

"Whereas both the federal and provincial governments have each committed \$40 million towards the widening of Highway 17/174;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide the necessary funding to the

united counties of Prescott and Russell to undertake the environmental assessments required for the widening of Highway 17/174 from two to four lanes between Trim Road and Prescott-Russell Regional Road 8.”

I gladly add my signature to the petition.

MOTORCYCLE SAFETY

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas to impose a total ban on an activity or sport under the guise of protecting the public from injury as presented by ... Bill 117 to amend the Highway Traffic Act, section 38.1, ‘No person shall drive or operate a motorcycle on a highway if another person under the age of 14 years is a passenger on the motorcycle,’ would be an injustice to us, the people of Ontario; and

“Whereas the restrictive aspects of this proposal far outweigh the minor risks associated and confirmed by the annual Ministry of Transportation statistical safety reports, and further, there is no clear distinction that ‘motorcycle-related injuries’ apply to Ontario streets or highways, as stated in defence of Bill 117;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Request that Bill 117 be rejected and not become law.”

I’ve also signed this, and Megan will take it to the clerks.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with the Burk’s Falls health centre. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Burk’s Falls ... health centre provides vital health services for residents of Burk’s Falls and the Almaguin Highlands of all ages, as well as seasonal residents and tourists; and

“Whereas the health centre helps to reduce demand on the Huntsville hospital emergency room; and

“Whereas the operating budget for Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is insufficient to meet the growing demand for service in the communities of Muskoka–East Parry Sound; and

“Whereas budget pressures could jeopardize continued operation of the Burk’s Falls health centre;

“Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the McGuinty government and Minister of Health provide adequate increases in the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to maintain current health services, including those provided by the Burk’s Falls health centre.”

I support this petition and give it to Noel.

BIOGAS FACILITY

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I have a petition from the London Optimist Sports Centre at 6 Cuddy Blvd., London, Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the construction of a biogas facility in proximity to the London Optimist Sports Centre would be detrimental to the health and safety of the patrons of the sports centre; and

“Whereas it is within the jurisdiction of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to refrain from granting environmental approval of the biogas facility;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“We wish to lodge our objections to any environmental approval of a biogas facility at 8 Cuddy Blvd. in London, Ontario by Z7529 Almira Truck Service Ltd.”

The applicant respectfully requests that the Legislative Assembly refuse to grant such approval.

I agree with the petition and I affix my signature to it.

1540

SERVICES FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care funds the school health support service through community care access centres across this province for children with special needs who require physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech-language therapy in public schools and in private and home schools; and

“Whereas the Minister of Children and Youth Services envisions an Ontario where all children and youth have the best opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential; and

“Whereas school-aged children with complex and multiple disabilities residing within the Erie St. Clair CCAC region receive a severely eroded level of service that denies them the best opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential; and

“Whereas school-aged children with complex and multiple disabilities residing in Sarnia–Lambton can now no longer receive these school health support services from Pathways Health Centre for Children, the children’s treatment centre in our community that employs paediatric specialists who work with these children from birth;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately transfer funding and responsibility for delivery of school health support service to school-aged children with complex and multiple disabilities from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and community access care centres to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.”

I agree with this petition and affix my signature to it.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I have a petition regarding property tax assessments.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontarians are angry over the volatility of the MPAC tax assessment system, the near impossibility to

predict one's assessment or to understand how it is arrived at, the patent unfairness of assessments and that the current system leaves many homeowners worried they may be forced to sell their homes; and

"Whereas changes are needed that will make Ontario's property tax system stable, understandable, fair and sensitive to homeowners; and

"Whereas property assessments in Parkdale-High Park have risen between 28% and 45% between 2005 and 2008;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: Support the 'freeze till sale' plan to bring fairness to Ontario's property tax system so that new assessments happen only at the time of sale and when a building permit is obtained for renovations totalling more than \$40,000."

I certainly agree with this and will give this to Carmen to be delivered.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition in support of our vulnerable foreign workers.

"Whereas a number of foreign worker and caregiver recruitment agencies have exploited vulnerable foreign workers; and

"Whereas foreign workers are subject to illegal fees and abuse at the hands of some of these unscrupulous recruiters; and

"Whereas the federal government in Ottawa has failed to protect foreign workers from these abuses; and

"Whereas, in Ontario, the former Conservative government deregulated and eliminated protection for foreign workers; and

"Whereas a great number of foreign workers and caregivers perform outstanding and difficult tasks on a daily basis in their work, with limited protection;

"We, the undersigned, support the Caregiver and Foreign Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, 2009, and urge its speedy passage into law."

I support this petition and I affix my name to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole: Today I've had two occasions to speak on this important issue and now I have thousands and more to come. The petition on this issue reads as follows:

"Whereas the municipality of Clarington passed resolution C-049-09 in support of Lakeridge Health Bowmanville; and

"Whereas area doctors, hospital staff and citizens have raised concerns that Bowmanville hospital could turn into little more than a site to stabilize and transfer patients for treatment outside the municipality; and

"Whereas Clarington is" indeed "a growing community of over 80,000; and

"Whereas we support the continuation of the Lakeridge Bowmanville site through access to on-site ser-

vices, including emergency room, internal medicine and general surgery;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the McGuinty government take all the necessary actions to fund our hospitals equally and fairly. And furthermore, we request that the clinical services plan of the Central East LHIN address the need for the Bowmanville hospital to continue to offer a complete range of services appropriate for the growing community of Clarington."

I am pleased to sign and support this on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham.

INTERPROVINCIAL BRIDGE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas:

"(1) ROCHE-NCE, a consulting firm hired to study potential sites for an interprovincial crossing between Ottawa and Gatineau, is recommending that an interprovincial bridge across the Ottawa River be built at Kettle Island, connecting to the scenic Aviation Parkway in Ottawa, turning it into a four-lane commuter and truck route passing through downtown residential communities; and

"(2) Along the proposed route are homes, seniors' apartments, schools, parks, the Montfort Long Term Care Facility and the Montfort Hospital, all of which would be severely impacted by noise, vibration and disease-causing air pollution; and

"(3) A truck and commuter route through neighbourhoods is a safety issue because of the increased risk to pedestrians and cyclists and the transport of hazardous materials; and

"(4) There are other, more suitable corridors further east, outside of the downtown core, which would have minimal impact on Ottawa residents;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To reject the recommendation of a bridge at Kettle Island and to select a more suitable corridor to proceed to phase 2 of the interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study."

I agree with this petition and send it to the table by page Megan.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: "To the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario:

"Tay township, Simcoe county, in the riding of Simcoe North, has a population of 10,000 persons and a taxpayer base of 5,500. There are 2,144 sewer users and 3,038 water users. The burgeoning capital and operating costs as a result of provincially legislated rules and requirements are more than the limited number of taxpayers can afford.

"The following taxpayers petition the Legislature for relief with grant funds. Recent grant applications have all been turned down."

I'm pleased to sign on behalf of my constituents.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents, as requested in Bill 33, put forward by MPP Kim Craitor.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and....

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

PENSION PLANS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present another petition which is emblematic of a problem in our society. It reads as follows:

"Whereas consumers rely on timely and accurate information from insurance companies and other financial institutions when they apply for access to locked-in pension funds; and

"Whereas the disclosure of wrong or incomplete information about pension fund access can have devastating consequences for the consumer; and

"Whereas the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) is currently limited in its power to enforce standards for the disclosure of information about access to pension funds;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to enact the necessary laws or regulations that will enable the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) to hold financial institutions fully accountable for information they give clients about access to pension funds."

I'm pleased to sign and support this on behalf of many seniors who are having difficulty with their pensions.

BATHURST HEIGHTS ADULT LEARNING CENTRE

Mr. Mike Colle: I've got a petition from the good people of the Bathurst Heights ESL centre in my riding.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are over 2,000 adult ESL students being served by the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre, operated by the Toronto District School Board, in partnership with the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas this is the only English as a second language (ESL) learning centre in this area of the city located directly on the Spadina subway line, making it accessible for students across the city; and

"Whereas newcomers in Toronto, and in the Lawrence Heights area, need the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre so they can succeed in their career opportunities; and

"Whereas the proposed revitalization of Lawrence Heights threatens the existence of the centre;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, request that any revitalization of Lawrence Heights include a newcomer centre and ensure that the Bathurst Heights centre continues to exist in the present location."

I know that the member from Trinity-Spadina also supports this. I'll affix my name, but I can't affix his name.

1550

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario:

"Tay township, Simcoe county, in the riding of Simcoe North, has a population of 10,000 persons and a taxpayer base of 5,500. There are 2,144 sewer users and 3,038 water users. The burgeoning capital and operating costs as a result of provincially legislated rules and requirements are more than the limited number of taxpayers can afford;

"The following taxpayers petition the Legislature for relief with grant funds. Recent grant applications have all been turned down."

I'm pleased to sign that on behalf of my constituents.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2009 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 30, 2009, on the amendment to the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: "To whom it may concern:

"My name is Shannon Horner-Shepherd, and today I will be going in to US Steel to receive my notice that my services will no longer be required. I began my employment with US Steel (Stelco) almost exactly 11 years ago, May 24, 1998. How do I know that exact date ... it was the day that I breathed a sigh of relief that I had found stable employment and it was one week after I learned that my newborn daughter, Gabrielle, would probably not live to see her first birthday. You see, at the

time, I was a single mom of two children, Sumer, four years old, and Gabby, five weeks old. I felt blessed that in the turmoil of learning that my newborn daughter had been born with Trisomy 13, a rare genetic disorder that, at best, would see her being severely physically and developmentally disabled and, at worst, cause her a premature death, I had a 'good' job. It was my job at the steel mill that gave me a feeling of safety and hope, a feeling of security, that I would be able to look after both of my children and be able to provide the care that would be required to help Gabby live her life to its fullest potential. I had health benefits, something I had never had before for my children. I had job security for the rest of my life. I wouldn't need to worry about how I would pay for the medications, the therapies or all the added necessities that come along with having a child with a severe disability. I had hope.

"Today, as I stand before you, my hope has been replaced with worry, my heart has been filled with dread and my shoulders are burdened with stress. I am still the mom to Sumer, who is now 15, Gabby, who has just had her 11th birthday, and also Justin and Nicholas, my twin sons, who are five years old. Gabby is still alive, and yes, the best-case scenario was true ... she is severely physically and developmentally delayed, but she is alive. I will be filing for my unemployment insurance on Monday, but I know that with the severe backlog of EI claims, it will be weeks before I see my first payment. As I have been honest with you in baring my heart, I will be honest now. I, just like thousands of other steelworkers who are now out of work, don't have weeks to wait. I have done my best to minimize the collateral damage that will be done once I lose my job. I have tried to explain to my boys that right now 'mommy doesn't have the money' to buy the Hot Wheels set that my sons so badly want ... how do I make them understand that the simple toys that they want are enough money to buy milk and bread and diapers for their 11-year-old sister? How is it that I have gone from being envied by others for having a stable job and health benefits to being pitied for being a steelworker and that I will now be living below the poverty level?

"Have I lived past my means? I don't think so. Did I buy a wheelchair-accessible house last year so that I didn't have to worry about Gabby falling down the stairs and fracturing her spine again? Yes. Have I purchased a van that can be wheelchair accessible if and when Gabby has a stroke and becomes permanently wheelchair-bound? Yes. I have tried to get through the last 11 years with being the least amount of burden on the system because I could theoretically 'afford' to have a disabled child? Yes. Have I put money aside so that my other children will be able to attend college or university in the future? Yes. Have I lived beyond my means? No. I've just simply 'lived.'

"Now, I am praying to the same person I prayed to 11 years ago, but this time I am not praying that my baby girl lives just one more day, makes it to one more Christmas or sees one more birthday. No, this time I'm praying that I'll be able to keep my house, feed my kids

and find a job that will help cover the medical expenses. I need a job that provides security and stability. I know that EI cannot cover the expenses that I have in a month, that I will have to choose between Easter presents for my kids or gas in my van to take Gabby to doctors' appointments. I will try to accept the fact that I am no longer employed in a sector that has job stability and was once, along with the auto workers, the pride of Ontario. I will accept the fact that I, just like so many others, will have gone from being able to provide the little extras that we all long for to not being able to provide basics. I will wake up each day as I did starting 11 years ago and pray that we make it through just one more day, week and month and maybe, just maybe, someone will hear me, and my prayers will be answered."

The budget that was delivered last week by the government did not answer the prayers of Shannon, did not answer the prayers of her family. In fact, today New Democrats, just like Shannon and just like so many other people across this province, are profoundly disappointed with the government's budget. It's a budget that misses the mark. It misses the mark in so, so many ways for the hundreds of thousands of women and men who have lost their jobs just like Shannon and the many, many more who are just a pink slip away. This budget has made their lives even harder.

I thank the members for allowing me to read that letter into the record because when I heard it for the first time, about a week and a half ago, I didn't know what was in the government's budget. But when I reflected upon how I would put into words the profound disappointment—profound disappointment—that we feel in this budget, I thought the best way to do that would be in the words of a woman like Shannon. In a steelworker's home in Hamilton a week and a half ago, when she read out the speech after learning that she was no longer going to be employed at US Steel, there wasn't a dry eye in that crowd. I told her that when I got the chance, I would make sure that I let the people in this chamber, particularly the government members, know the kind of pain and anxiety that she is facing with her job loss. To Shannon Horner-Shepherd, I think we all owe a debt of gratitude because she bared her soul. She bared her life, and gave me the opportunity to illustrate to members in this chamber and to the rest of Ontario exactly what real people in this province are feeling: the fear and the anxiety.

That fear and anxiety have not in any way been assuaged by this government's budget. Ontarians were looking for a budget that actually delivered hope, that delivered real hope, but we didn't see it. Instead, we ended up with a budget that provides some short-term jobs. We were hoping for long-term jobs. We were hoping for a budget that was going to provide long-term jobs, a budget that was going to lay a long-term economic vision for this province, but we didn't see that.

Instead of bold vision in tough times, women and men of this province got what? They got an 8% tax increase. An 8% tax increase is what the women and men of this

province got instead of getting real delivery in terms of hope for the future so that people like Shannon and so many others would know that eventually they would have a long-term job to go to. But that didn't happen. Instead they're going to have an 8% increase on the basic necessities of life. When Shannon goes with her child to take her to that doctor's appointment, it's going to cost 8% more to fill up that van with gasoline. Instead of a jobs plan that reinvigorates our industrial sector, we got a massive overhaul of the tax system in the province of Ontario. That is not what Ontarians wanted. That's not what they were looking for in this particular budget. They were looking for relief, and instead they got a tax hike.

Budgets are about priorities, and it's clear that the McGuinty government's priorities are miles apart—miles apart—from the priorities of worried families in this province. For those reasons, and for others I'm going to be outlining today, New Democrats will definitely be voting against this budget.

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The first issue I want to spend some time on is the harmonized sales tax. I think it's really clear and really important to put out there that there's nothing harmonious at all in the harmonized tax. There's nothing harmonious about the tax at all. The new tax hike is going to put 8% on goods and services that were previously not taxed—8%. We've said this time and again over the last couple of days: 8% on everyday purchases that families have to make. Filling up the car or van on the way to work, 8% more; paying the monthly electricity bill on home heating, 8% more; buying an inexpensive pair of shoes, 8% more; newspaper and magazine subscriptions, 8% more; getting your hair done, 8% more; paying the Internet bill, 8% more; buying prepared foods under \$4, morning coffee and doughnut, going to the hot dog stand, 8% more; for new homes over \$400,000, 2% more. People think, "2%? That doesn't sound like much. What's the big deal with 2%?" Well, on a \$350,000 home, which is the average home price in this area, that's an extra \$7,000.

These tax increases are not just to get us through the economic crisis; these tax increases are permanent. These are permanent measures that families will feel the brunt of not just for weeks and months to come, but forever. They're going to be felt immediately, and they're going to be felt over the long term, long after the Dalton dollars are handed out in the next year and a half or so. With joblessness rising and people settling for lower pay, family incomes are not rising. Tax hikes are going to have a real, measured impact on families with already strained budgets.

At the pump, the tax grab is going to add 7 cents to an 85-cents-a-litre fill-up. That's a bite; that's a bite out of the pocketbook, absolutely. But what happens in the summer, and we know it's going to happen, when gas goes up to \$1.35 a litre? It wasn't so long ago that it was up that high. Then we're going to have another 10 cents on top of that, foisted on people by Dalton McGuinty's

budget. People aren't looking forward to that. Already they can't afford to make ends meet. Already people are struggling, and yet this government thinks it's the right time to ding them again with an 8% tax increase.

We're not talking about nickels and dimes. The average household already spends about \$2,000 a year to heat their home and another \$2,000 to pay for electricity. What that means is that with this new tax increase, an extra \$320 is going to come out of each and every person's pocket just to pay the taxes on these utilities, on these bills. When all the extra costs are built in, the extra 8% on the coffee, the doughnuts, inexpensive shoes, what's going to happen? It's very, very obvious. The cost of day-to-day life is going to increase, and that increase is a direct result of this government's decision to ding people with an 8% tax. It's going to cost families a lot more just to get by, and that's the vision that this government brings to the table in a time of economic crisis when people are so concerned, so worried about the future. And what response do they get from their callous government? They get a whack over the head with a new tax.

The McGuinty Liberals are claiming that companies will lower their prices as a result. That's what we're hearing, right? As a result of this harmonization process, companies will be saving, and those savings are going to get passed on to the consumer. That's what Dalton and Dwight would have us believe. After all, between big corporate tax breaks and the end of the sales tax on inputs, corporations in fact are the ones that are the big winners in this budget. But does anybody here really believe, does anybody across Ontario really believe, that oil and gas companies are going to be passing on their savings to consumers, to people like you and me? I don't think so. In fact, I don't think anybody believes that there's actually going to be a reduction in prices as a result of the harmonized tax. What about home heating and electricity? Everybody expects, I'm sure, that Enbridge in Thunder Bay, Hydro Ottawa and Union Gas are all going to be reducing their prices to offset this 8% tax increase, right? I'm sure that's what people expect.

In fact, when you don't get your rebate, when you don't get your price reduction you should be calling Dalton McGuinty and Dwight Duncan and your Liberal MPPs and have them explain why it is—

Interjection.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Oh, I'm sorry. Thank you, Speaker. I'll use the proper titles.

Will Tim Hortons bring their coffee and muffin prices down? I somehow doubt it. Will Ontario home builders take that \$7,000 hit? I don't think so. I think that quite the opposite is going to happen. In fact, I'm sure of it. I don't believe it, New Democrats don't believe it and families and people in Ontario don't believe it either. They don't believe it because it's something that has been tried before. That theory has been pitched. It has been pitched many times, and it used to be called trickle-down economics: the old theory that says that corporate tax cuts are going to eventually create jobs and prosperity

for everyone. Well, it hasn't worked. It doesn't work and it hasn't worked.

We don't have to look farther than the United States for an obvious case study of this. Years of slashing corporate taxes have gone hand in hand with deregulation. The result has been that millions of families are losing their jobs, losing their savings, losing their homes. We were talking just today earlier about the prices of houses in the United States. Things are so desperate there that you can get a house that was once \$400,000 for \$99,000. So it's obvious that those policies don't work. They're policies that don't work, and yet this government hangs its hat on it.

Thursday's budget couldn't have been more clear about this government's commitment to that very same suite of policies, to trickle-down economics. They're giving \$4.5 billion in corporate income tax cuts over the next three years. That's obscene. It's obscene because it's a tax on corporate profits, and the companies that need help in this brutal recession are not the companies that are making profits right now. The ones that make profits don't need the help. It's the ones that aren't making profits that need the help. The government has its priorities backwards. At the same time, this budget took \$2.3 billion out of the pockets of hard-pressed consumers. In other words, \$4.5 billion is being shovelled out the door to exactly the wrong companies at the wrong time.

The government could have chosen the side of ordinary Ontarians by tabling bold, new job plans for the people of this province. It didn't. And in the midst of what's perhaps the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, Ontarians should be very worried. There are struggling companies out there in real need. They are losing money and they are laying off workers and cutting hours, wages and benefits. They're not going to benefit. These companies are not going to benefit from the corporate income tax cuts and it's not going to help them stem the worries and frustrations being felt by the people who work for those companies.

I wonder how the Premier came to support sales tax harmonization. After all, it wasn't so long ago—only in November of 2008—that the Premier and his finance minister rejected the HST. Recommendations made by his task force on competitiveness, productivity and economic progress said that he should be implementing the HST, but he rejected it out of hand at the time—both the finance minister and the Premier. In fact, when the report came out, the Premier worried about the impact of HST on who? Who did he worry about the impact on? He worried about the impact on families, the Premier did, not so long ago. Here's what he said:

"Not only from our treasury perspective but from the perspective of consumers, some things like children's snowsuits, home heating fuel and other things like that that are really important to consumers would go up in cost."

Talk about crocodile tears. And didn't we find out about the sincerity of this Premier and his words a mere

six months ago when, just a few days ago, instead of being concerned about the families in this province and the effect that the HST would have on them, he turned full circle and rammed it down their throats? So now the very suffering of families who are going to have to worry about things like children's snowsuits, home heating fuel and other things like that that are really important, the Premier says, to consumers—because the costs will go up with the HST. He doesn't care about that anymore, apparently. The finance minister and the Premier don't care about that anymore. They're not concerned anymore. I don't know why.

Things have gotten much worse, actually, in the last six months for families than they were when that report came forward. Things are much worse today and the outlook is much worse today than it was when that report was first delivered into their hands. But for some reason, notwithstanding the fact that back then, in musing with the Premier about why it was a bad thing to put this HST in place, Minister Duncan mentioned that it wasn't time to tinker with the province's tax regime—that was some time ago. Why is it that after a few short months go by and things look much, much worse than they did then, the finance minister and the Premier turn full circle? It's unbelievable that when things got worse, the government, instead of making things better for people, chose to bring forward a budget that makes things better for large corporations and turned its back on regular folks in this province.

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Less than six months later, deeper into the economic crisis, the government is proposing full-scale tax harmonization. The McGuinty government has gone from cautious to callous and has put big corporate tax giveaways ahead of jobs and ahead of a basic jobs strategy that would put workforce protections in place in this province.

Budget 2009 shows that this government has struck a backroom deal with the federal Conservative government. As a result, Mr. McGuinty has taken a page right out of Stephen Harper's ideological playbook. The budget offered the government a chance to make smart and sound investments, to guarantee long-term job growth, and again, the government missed its mark.

New Democrats believe that the key to any smart long-term jobs strategy is investing strategically to secure Ontario's future industrial capacity. The government have not done that at all. Instead, they've chosen the easy way out by shovelling taxpayers' hard-earned money out the door without ensuring that long-term jobs of the future are going to be created right here in Ontario. Make no mistake: New Democrats do support infrastructure spending. But if this government was serious about positioning Ontario's economy for the future, they could have brought forward a buy-Ontario policy with real teeth.

I'm going to give you an example. New Democrats are strong supporters of funding public transit systems, but that spending should be creating real long-term jobs right

here in this province. We've called for a buy-Ontario requirement that 50% of the value of all transit vehicles purchased in Ontario be made in Ontario. Similar provisions already exist in the United States and Quebec. This province can be a global leader in manufacturing cutting-edge transit vehicles, but only if subways and streetcars are manufactured in Thunder Bay and buses are manufactured in Mississauga.

New Democrats are strong supporters of spending on bridges and roads and sewers, but the steel that goes into those projects needs to come from Hamilton and Sault Ste. Marie, not offshore.

There was an opportunity in this budget to turn Ontario into a green energy technology leader, but nowhere in the budget is there a hard requirement that 60% of the content of new wind and solar projects be manufactured here in Ontario. Quebec has exactly that policy, and, as such, they have ended up in a situation where they are the lead manufacturer of wind turbines across the entire country.

So here's an example—I've already actually given one example, the example of the human costs of not implementing an effective buy-Ontario program, because if we had an effective buy-Ontario program, we would still be making steel in places like Hamilton. People like Shannon would still be able to have a job; she could make sure that her family's needs are being looked after, ensure that her disabled child gets to those appointments, that they have gas in the van to be able to move around, make sure that they still have a roof over their heads and can make ends meet. Just like I said in my opening remarks, in Shannon's words, she's extremely concerned, like so many Ontarians, about just keeping a roof over their heads.

Shannon is looking for the government to institute a buy-Ontario program for infrastructure that would require that most of the steel used in taxpayer-funded projects is coming from Ontario. That's not a lot to expect, that a government understand the value—the necessity—of maintaining a decent manufacturing and industrial sector in this province. It's the backbone of the good jobs that people in this province have been able to rely on to create a decent standard of living and quality of life not only for themselves and their families but for the communities that they live in. In Shannon's view, a policy just like that would have helped US Steel to get her and her fellow laid-off steelworkers back to work. Like most workers, she would like some sense of security from the government that they won't let her family and all the families in similar situations fall through the cracks.

Unfortunately, the government did exactly that. They brought down a budget that is letting not only Shannon but many, many families—steelworkers, auto workers, forestry workers, manufacturing of all sorts, workers who do that kind of work, are all falling through the cracks because of the lack of vision and lack of leadership that this government has shown in its recent budget.

Here's another example: Dominic has worked at the Thunder Bay Bombardier plant for 22 years as an

assembly worker, spot welder, NC operator and quality control inspector, and now as a machinist. Previously, Dominic worked for seven years in the forest industry as a lumber scaler. Dominic feels that manufacturing—the key to Ontario's economy—is drying up at an alarming rate and fears that too many plants are being shut down at breakneck speed. Dominic says this: "Once these industries shut down it is very expensive to start them up again. Our ability to produce real goods would be gone, leaving us to the mercy of foreign countries and corporations. This is especially dangerous at a time of war or economic uncertainty." If Ontario had a real requirement that 50% of the value of transit vehicles were manufactured in Ontario, then Dominic would feel that his job was safe.

I want to talk a little bit more about the other way in which this budget missed the mark. The government could have demanded real accountability for taxpayer-funded assistance programs for the ailing companies that we're going to be shoring up. There's close to \$3 billion allocated in the budget for distressed industries, but there's no indication that the government has learned the lessons of the past, and so there's no requirement that real accountability is going to be tied to the monies that flow to help these industries. There's no doubt that government has an important role to play, and we support the need for government to play a role in ensuring that the core manufacturing and resource sectors emerge from this economic crisis and that they emerge in a healthy state, that they emerge robust and able to employ workers again in this province.

But we also believe that the companies have to be held accountable for the taxpayers' dollars that are being funnelled their way. I've mentioned this many times before, and I'm going to mention it again, because we firmly believe that that requires a number of things: one, iron-clad job and investment guarantees. We need to know for sure that as our dollars get flowed to these companies, the result is going to be that workers in this province are going to be put back to work, that the jobs are going to stay here, and that the investments that companies make in terms of research and development, in terms of the development of new products, happen here in the province of Ontario. In order to ensure that the accountability measures are put in place, we need accountability provisions that put the public and workers on the management boards of these companies. We need to have a voice in the decision-making that's happening. If our dollars are going in, then the accountability comes with us having a say in the decisions that are being made.

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Similarly, there's an opportunity as well to ensure that those dollars are treasured and used wisely by the companies by making sure that we have equity shares in return for the taxpayers' dollars.

Finally, we want to make sure that there are hard caps on executive compensation. We brought this issue to the table because we believe that the companies that are getting government aid have to make sure that their top

executives are not simply walking away with the money. We have to avoid the kinds of debacles that have already taken place across the border—things like AIG, if you remember that embarrassing moment not so long ago. We cannot have that happening here, and the only way to guarantee that we don't have it happening here is to make it very clear that those companies that accept assistance and aid from Ontarians agree to putting a hard cap on the salary of those executives.

I want to talk a little bit more about what we think could have been done in terms of creating jobs in this budget.

Since June 2004, almost 300,000 Ontarians in the manufacturing sector have lost their jobs. That doesn't include 18,000 direct jobs lost in the forestry sector, which has devastated many, many northern Ontario communities. Every part of this province has been hit hard by job loss, from Chapeau to Windsor and from Kenora to Cornwall.

Under the McGuinty Liberals, Ontarians have lost more than 30% of their high-paying manufacturing jobs. Some 30% of the good jobs in this province are now gone. That's \$13 billion ripped out of Ontario's economy. For the past five years, New Democrats have sounded the alarm over the loss of manufacturing jobs, and we have put forward constructive solutions: solutions like a jobs commissioner and a reasonable industrial hydro rate for such energy-intensive industries as forestry, steel, chemicals, pulp and paper. These are the good ideas the New Democrats have brought to the table, and we will continue to fight for those ideas.

But regrettably 300,000 lost manufacturing jobs is really just the tip of the iceberg. It's just the beginning of the issue. Dalton McGuinty has dithered during Ontario's manufacturing maelstrom, and bold action is needed if we are serious about sustaining good jobs and renewing our manufacturing sector.

I want to be blunt. It is just too damn easy to close a plant in the province of Ontario. Corporations are being allowed to continue to pull up stakes far too easily. Yet there is little in the way of protection for hard-working Ontarians. In this budget, the government had an opportunity to reassure these Ontarians that a lifetime of blood, sweat and tears for a company would actually account for something. The government had a chance to ensure that every last penny of back wages, of vacation pay, of severance and pensions would be paid out by a company if it runs for the border. But I looked in vain in the small print of this budget for any indication at all that the government would establish a wage protection fund that would protect the wages of workers. I looked in vain for any enhancement at all of Ontario's woefully inadequate pension backup so that pension benefits in this province are actually truly protected. I looked in vain for some sign, any sign, that the government would make an amendment to the Employment Standards Act that would force companies to sit down, to have a conversation, to try to come to some solutions with workers and with governments before a plant closes; to try to find whether there are alternatives to keep those plants open.

Did I find any of that in the budget? No, I did not. These things are simply nowhere to be found. Workers yet again are left holding the bag.

Another job measure that we thought should have been in the budget was an ambitious MUSH sector energy retrofit program: municipalities, universities, school boards and hospitals. There should have been a massive retrofit program for those institutions. There also should have been a measure that would have made environmentalism truly affordable by allowing homeowners an opportunity to pay for their energy retrofits out of long-term energy savings. People simply do not have the dollars sitting on the shelf to upfront the costs of retrofitting their homes. They don't have that money. If they didn't have it before, they most certainly don't have it now. Yet, there's nothing there to provide that opportunity upfront for people to start engaging in these kinds of retrofits in a proactive way. It would have created thousands of good-paying jobs in construction all across the province—jobs for someone like Keith, who is a construction worker living in Windsor.

Let me tell you a little bit about Keith. For over nine years, Keith has worked in every sector of the construction field: residential, commercial and industrial. Throughout this time, Keith has developed a diverse set of skills that has allowed him, even during the typical construction lull over the winter months, to maintain relative job stability and a steady income. Spring has arrived, and in spite of the variety of skills and work experience that Keith possesses, he still has not been able to obtain work in any division of construction. Layoffs have always been a reality in his field, and in Windsor during the winter months particularly. However, the economic crisis and the current lack of work have only served to intensify Keith's concerns for his future. Keith is exactly the kind of person who would really have benefited from a large-scale retrofit program, but unfortunately this government did not deliver that opportunity to Keith in their budget.

I want to talk about the jobs crisis in northern Ontario, because the scale is absolutely enormous. I had the opportunity to spend some time in northern Ontario over the last couple of months, and I can tell you that communities are devastated. People are worried that whole towns are shutting down. There's no opportunity for young people. It's unbelievable to see what's happening in northern Ontario right now. There was hardly a mention at all in this budget about the good forestry jobs that have been lost in northern Ontario—Buchanan Forest Products in Terrace Bay; Tembec closures in Mattawa, Marathon, Hearst, Cochrane and Spruce Falls; Domtar in Nairn, Ear Falls, Espanola and Thunder Bay; AbitibiBowater in Thunder Bay and in Thorold. The list goes on.

The north has lost over 11,000 direct forestry jobs since this government came into office—11,000 direct jobs. For every one of those jobs there are four other jobs: 44,000 indirect jobs have gone as well. We've lost a good portion of our value-added forestry sector in this

province—just completely gone, devastated. If this continues, Ontario may not be able to be making paper anymore at all. We'll just be shipping our trees, shipping them away, and the jobs that go with them, to the US.

We know the demand for forestry products is down. Absolutely, we know that. But the skyrocketing energy prices that are driving many of the companies out of business are the result of this government's lack of action. They just cannot compete. They just cannot compete because of the energy prices. Ontario's all-in electricity price is about \$72 a megawatt hour. It's one of the highest in all of Canada. It's certainly higher than in Manitoba. They have an industrial hydro rate in the \$40 per megawatt hour range—\$40 versus Ontario's, \$72. AbitibiBowater in Thunder Bay has the highest energy cost of all of their 25 mills across North America. Their Thunder Bay plant has the highest energy cost of 25 of their mills across North America. For AbitibiBowater to be profitable, the general manager indicated that they need a \$50 rate. To quote an article from the *Globe and Mail*: "At some point, with demand for paper down, AbitibiBowater will have to decide whether to pull out of Thunder Bay and consolidate production elsewhere."

So it isn't just an issue of demand in the forestry industry. It's about the McGuinty government ignoring practical, tangible policies, like an industrial hydro rate that will sustain these good jobs.

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I want to talk a little bit about child care in this province. The McGuinty government has shown little to no commitment to properly funding child care in Ontario. Five years ago Dalton McGuinty promised \$300 million for affordable child care spaces across Ontario, but he didn't deliver. The March 2008 budget, a year ago, didn't even have a line item for child care. This year we see more of the same: not a line item for child care.

But what is even worse is that there are 22,000 child care spaces to be cut by the end of this fiscal year. It's shocking. It's absolutely shocking, the inaction of the McGuinty government on the child care file. This is exactly the kind of uncertainty that parents and children don't need in an already volatile economy. This is while there are tens of thousands of eligible children on waiting lists across the province. The existing system doesn't even scratch the surface of the need out there, yet this government is saying they're not even prepared to support the meagre, paltry level of child care that's currently provided to families in this province. More than 23,000 families are on waiting lists in Toronto, Ottawa and London together. Cutting subsidized spaces is going to have a destructive effect on the system, and it's going to destabilize Ontario's child care from one end to the other.

Parents, advocates, antipoverty activists and ordinary Ontarians called on the provincial government to save these spaces, to address the funding shortfall that was left by the federal government. Once again, today we heard the minister, instead of taking ownership of this file, instead of acknowledging and recognizing that child care

is a provincial responsibility and doing something about it, simply turn her face to the federal government, blame them and say, "It's all their fault." Well, it's not their fault that the provincial government refused to make good on the \$300-million promise that was made some five years ago. That's not Harper's responsibility. That's the responsibility of the McGuinty Liberals, yet they have not fulfilled that promise. Now here we are, several years later, and the federal dollars—not the provincial dollars; the federal dollars—that were shoring up our child care system have been pulled out from under us, and there's no plan for this government to deal with the devastation that that's going to cause families and children.

The absence of child care funding in the federal budget was disappointing, there's no doubt, but it wasn't surprising; everybody expected that it was coming. It's something that this government also suspected was coming for months and months. The McGuinty government has simply shirked its responsibility on child care.

Full-day learning is not a replacement for adequate, affordable, accessible, not-for-profit licensed child care. The further shame of the matter is that the full-day learning that was announced a couple of years ago still does not, in this budget today, have a funding allocation.

New Democrats demand immediate action to maintain the current subsidized spaces and further investment to expand affordable, accessible, not-for-profit, licensed child care in this province. We know that this can be achieved by the government.

I want to revisit the story of a young mother. Her name is Susanne; she's from Toronto. She's on 25 child care centre waiting lists. It's unfathomable. It's unbelievable: 25 waiting lists she has put her name on for her children.

She has been on the waiting lists since she was only a few months pregnant. She and her husband have put down deposit after deposit after deposit, just to get on those waiting lists. They took time off work to tour the child care centres so that they knew where it was that they were hoping to put their child, in terms of a placement. She followed up regularly, Susanne did; she followed up constantly. She's done everything she could to try to get that elusive space.

Now, with only a couple of months left in her maternity leave, she still does not have child care, and she and her husband have to undertake an untenable plan: Each of them has to take some time off work, unpaid time off work, something which they can ill afford.

The Premier presented a budget which not only reaches further into the pockets of average people with the harmonized sales tax but it does not address the basic access to services like child care in Ontario. Affordable, accessible, non-profit, licensed child care programs are an investment. They're an investment in our children's future. They're an investment in our province's future prosperity. They are not social programs.

Child care is an economic imperative for families and women. Such child care allows parents, especially

mothers, to attend school, to go to continuing education or to actively seek employment. It is an essential component to any poverty reduction strategy. In fact, you only need to look at what happened in Quebec when they brought in their universal child care program. There was a 50% reduction in child poverty.

If this government thinks it can pull the wool over people's eyes by saying that it's dealing with child poverty in this province and yet not put in place a universal, not-for-profit child care system that's accessible to all families, then they have another thing coming, because everybody knows—it's known around the world—that that's exactly what will help significantly reduce child poverty.

I would suggest that the government take another look, a second look and a third look. They've seen two Ministers of Children and Youth Services walk away. Two very strong women walked away because this government has failed children in this province year over year.

I want to end by saying that the New Democrats in this Legislature have known year after year, as budget after budget comes down, that this government is out of touch, and we've seen a government out of touch as we've watched jobs leave by the hundreds of thousands, not just in the last couple of months or the last couple of years.

But I have to tell you, Speaker, we were shocked to see the callous way that the people of Ontario were treated by their government just a few short days ago when this budget was introduced. Not only are some of the most important issues not being dealt with, issues of the long-term shoring up of our manufacturing industrial sector, issues of child care for the families of this province, issues of providing hope for people that this crisis can be weathered and that the storm eventually will be ending and people will eventually be able to get jobs back—we didn't see any of that in this budget. Shockingly, what we saw instead was a government that preferred to spend its budget on giving swaths and swaths of money to Ontario's corporate sector while whacking regular folks, regular people, the women and men of this province, with a significant tax increase that's going to make every day more unaffordable at a time when families can least afford that kind of tax increase.

In ending my remarks, I have to say this: The depth of disappointment and frustration and anger that we feel over this budget is only exceeded by the depth of the anger and frustration that the people of Ontario are telling us that they hear in terms of this budget as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: We've had the opportunity over the past few days to hear, first, from the finance minister in the introduction of the budget and all of its inclusions, we've heard from the leader of the official opposition and now we've heard from the leader of the third party. Now it's the opportunity for us members to be able to speak to this year's budget and all of its inclusions from all of the points of view that are likely to be expressed over the course of the debate.

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I want to start by talking a little bit about what this budget is about; what is the intent, what is the focus, what is the theme of the budget.

This budget is about a variety of things. It's about helping families at a time when we're in a global recession, an economic climate that we haven't seen in 80 years, a time of some economic upheaval, not just in Ontario, but throughout the world. It's about helping families during this period of time when we are faced with this degree of economic change. It's about taking actions to make Ontario more competitive. It's about not ending up at the end of this recessionary period standing still, but ending up at the end of this recessionary period, as we come through it and out of it, in a position of leadership. In the absence of action, the best we could hope for might be to tread water, and that's certainly not good enough for Ontario. It's about stimulating the local economy, the Ontario economy, as we work through this recessionary period.

So there are a variety of things that are happening: taking care of families; ensuring that we retain and grow our opportunities and our competitive advantages; and using this as an opportunity in Ontario to support the economy, particularly as it relates to things like our basic infrastructure—our water, our sewers, our roads, our bridges, our public transit—an opportunity to invest in those and rebuild those.

We've been through tough times in the past. This isn't the first time; it probably won't be the last. But certainly Ontario is up to this particular challenge, and we're up to it to a large extent because we are Ontario.

If there's one comprehensive part of the budget that's likely to be recognized at the end of the day as the fundamental part of this budget we're into now, it's our comprehensive tax reforms. That's personal tax reforms—individuals and their families seeing reductions in their personal income tax—as well as the other tax measures. I'll probably touch upon a couple of those, and I know others in this chamber will speak to them as we move through this period of debate.

I think that when we look back on this in the future, we'll look to this as a necessary shift to ensure that Ontario not only retains its current economic advantages, but positions itself well to attract new investment to Ontario.

What does new investment to Ontario mean? It means jobs. It means jobs for our families, it means jobs for our children, it means jobs for our neighbours. Going through the types of tax reform structures that we're envisioning at this point—it's not about enhancing the profit margins of the corporations; it's not about paying additional dividends to the shareholders. Our part of the bargain is to ensure that businesses have the economic climate to invest in this province to retain and create jobs. Their part of the bargain is to produce those jobs so that our children and our neighbours and our families have places to work in this province as we move forward.

It's really a pretty simple equation when you think about it; the equation being, how do you ensure that your

business climate is such, your tax structure is such, that businesses can and want to do business here, and in return for that, they provide the jobs that allow us to support our families; send our children to the colleges and universities; ensure we have the health care we need; allow us, when we have to, to support aging parents beyond what the system does for us; allow us to ensure that those extras we want when our sons and daughters are getting married—that we can provide the type of atmosphere that we want to provide for them, that in those very special moments in their lives, we have the capacity to be able to support them. So we're making some fundamental changes in our tax system, both from an individual perspective and from a corporate perspective, to allow to us do many or all of those things.

Now, the tax package overall is a pretty balanced package, when one looks at it. There will be pieces that over the next days and weeks people will point at and say, "Well, you're doing this for this person or corporation," or "This is going to happen to me on an individual basis," or "I'm going to pay a little bit more for this service here," but when you begin looking at the whole package, it's a pretty balanced package.

In effect, at the end of this process we're into right now, over the next four years, we're projecting that government revenues will actually be reduced by about \$2.3 billion. We're not looking at fresh, new tax dollars to enhance the province's bottom line. We're actually saying that going through this process that we're into is going to cost the province on its revenue stream.

Why is it going to cost the province money on their revenue stream? Principally because we're putting money back into the system to support individuals and families of lower and moderate income, seniors who need support with things like tax credits and with their property tax. We're putting money back into the system to ensure that those individuals and families who can least afford it are not impacted by some of the changes that are proposed in the tax structure. So this is not a net gain to the province of Ontario. This actually, in the short term or mid-term, will be a loss to the revenue stream.

Now, the objectives are not to ensure that those losses continue. The objectives are to ensure that the business climate is such that we will see more jobs, more opportunities for people to invest back into the economy, more opportunities for the economy to grow, and ultimately that we will be in a better place than we are today with the situation we have.

Now, in doing all this, we're not about to abandon the principles, the core values we have as a government, to ensure that we have quality public services. We haven't invested hundreds of millions and billions of dollars in health and education, we're not building new hospitals, we're not planning do the types of retrofits in schools that have been ongoing—we're not planning to abandon those initiatives as a result of the current economic climate. What we're saying is that we have to continue with those initiatives. We have to ensure that from the standpoint of a solid public service base that we have

rebuilt over the past five years, we're going to continue down that road.

We're going to ensure that our students have class sizes in which they can learn. We're going to ensure that young people have an opportunity to go beyond secondary school, with higher graduation numbers, on to post-secondary education. We're going to ensure that when we go to the hospital, we can get the service we need. We're going to add to the medical spaces at our medical schools so we can put more doctors into the system to support our families. We're going to continue to build on the core public services for which this government has become known over the past five or six years.

We're going to do that in the context of the current economic environment, at the same time as we fundamentally reform some of our tax structures and support families and individuals during that period of time. While we're doing this, 93% of Ontarians will actually pay less on their personal income tax—93%.

Now, we all know that that means there will be some who won't pay less, and there are those within the province who will probably pay a little bit more. There will probably be many of us who are in this room right now, either as legislators or we've come here from other fields of endeavour—we have those of us who might have been in education, those of us who come from engineering. We have doctors and lawyers, and engineers within this room—

Interjection: Accountants.

Interjection: Farmers.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: And accountants and farmers. I suspect that very few of us, if any, will benefit from the income tax reductions that are proposed. We can probably include ourselves, for the most part, within that 7% who aren't going to be advantaged directly by the shifts we're making, and that's appropriate, because we do find ourselves in a very special and unique position within the province, not only in what we do, but we fit within that context of folks who are beyond the lower-income group within our communities, and I suggest, for the most part, beyond those who are in that modest middle-income group.

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Part of the discussion that will be ongoing over the next period of time will be around the single sales tax. We expect that will take up a fair amount of our time and discussion during the coming days. You know, for those low-income and more moderate-income families, not only will there be direct tax relief—and that's part of the negotiation with the federal government, so that we can blend the two taxes into a single sales tax—but there are, I believe, about \$4.3 billion being provided by the federal government, \$4 billion of which will be put back in the hands of Ontarians as we make the transition to a single sales tax. Once that transition is in place, there will be ongoing tax credits for lower- and middle-income families, not unlike what currently exists with the GST, to provide direct tax credits for those who are paying slightly more on certain products by virtue of a blended tax.

In addition to the rebuild of our tax structure, there are other things that this budget is focused on.

During the past couple of years, we've put about \$18 billion into capital investment—infrastructure, hospitals, schools, roads, sewers—in support of municipalities across this province. In this budget, we're committing to some \$34 billion in economic stimulus over the next two years. About \$32 billion of that will be in exactly those kinds of things I was just speaking to: the roads in our communities, the need to upgrade old water systems, the need to put in place new sewer systems, the need to rebuild bridges that are falling down in rural communities, the need to rebuild social housing in many areas and the need to invest, with our municipalities, in basic municipal infrastructure. Not only are we getting jobs from this—tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of jobs during the next two years—but we are putting in place an infrastructure base that will carry us forward for the next 40 and 50 years in communities, and in some instances rebuilding—for those of us who can't see below the ground, there are those who work there, who work in the water lines, work in the sewer lines. They know what's been under our streets for the past 60, 70, 80, 90, 100 years. We'll rebuild that infrastructure with this money so we have a strong basis on which to grow.

Yesterday, the Minister of Transportation introduced new legislation in regard to the melding of Metrolinx and GO Transit so that we can move forward more effectively and more quickly on public transit investments. Well, certainly dollars within this \$32 billion of infrastructure funding are going to help to support that very public transit infrastructure we need in urban centres within this province. We're anxious, I know, in this House to see that legislation, the capacity of a new board to be able to move forward on the priorities, and our capacity with the dollars available to support those priorities. The sooner we can have shovels in the ground, the better, both from the standpoint of creating short-term employment, in relative terms, in the infrastructure, and also the continuation of our economic growth in longer-term employment. If you put a new bus route in, you've got to have drivers, and it's not just one driver. Bus systems run seven days a week, 18 or 20 hours a day. You start putting in the number of staff you need to run that bus route, and it's not one bus driver; it's five and six and seven and eight jobs one is creating. It's the old multiplier effect in many ways; infrastructure investment most often results in a multiplier effect.

A community that needs to build a new recreational facility to support the desires and aspirations of their residents and their young people: Those have to be staffed, and those become good-paying jobs in the community, in which they can help to support their families, grow their community, and invest back in their own community.

So I'm looking forward, I know, in my riding, and my communities in Pickering and Scarborough East are looking forward to this investment of infrastructure funding for a whole variety of activities, whether that's

the roads and the bridges, the sewers, the water, the municipal infrastructure, or the completion of hospital projects that are currently under way that are so vitally important to what we're doing.

We set out not long ago, it doesn't seem, with our \$30-billion ReNew Ontario infrastructure initiatives, and we achieved that in 2008-09. As a matter of fact, we're a full year ahead of what we had scheduled to put in some \$30 billion worth of investment in infrastructure in the province. When we started out on that plan, there were those who looked across the floor at us from the other side and said, "How can you possibly spend that kind of money on infrastructure? How can you commit to those kinds of dollars?"

Now we see ahead of time that those infrastructure initiatives—over 100 hospital projects. Virtually every riding that we have here has hospital or related projects going on. If it's not in your riding, it's certainly in the one next door. In my riding I don't physically have a hospital, but I very much depend upon the riding to the east and the riding to the west, both of which have one site of our hospital system and both of which my constituents depend upon for service, and we're investing in both of those sites as part of the Rouge Valley Health System.

I'm particularly anxious, as we move through this budgetary process, to hear from members on all sides—members of our caucus and members of the opposition. I want to hear about how they feel about the corporate income tax cuts that are being proposed. I want to hear how they feel about the reduction in the rates for manufacturing to 10% from 12% effective July 1, 2010. I want to hear about the personal income tax cuts that are being proposed. I want to hear about the infrastructure funding proposals. I want to hear about the child tax benefit enhancements that are being expedited, as well as the whole list of activities within this budget that are intended to support families, retain and grow our competitiveness in the economy and ensure that Ontario has a bright future, because we are Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Quite a presentation by the member from Pickering-Scarborough East; opened up on taking action with respect to competitiveness and let us know of the downfall of standing still or the absence of action. The member will know, also, as finance parliamentary assistant—he did put out the question at the very end of his remarks that he wants to know how we feel about the corporate income tax cuts that are proposed. Well, that's the problem that we have: These corporate income tax rate cuts are proposed; they're not in the budget papers and they're not in the budget. That's probably the obvious problem that we have with this.

I took a look at page 11 of the budget speech. This is the budget speech; this is not the budget. With respect to the corporate income tax rate, it leads off—it's like a bit of a fairytale—by stating, "Starting on July 1, 2010." Well, the fiscal year commences tomorrow. I guess it

commences at 12:01 this evening. These corporate income tax rate cuts will not be in the budget. As the parliamentary assistant has rightly indicated, they're proposed. It's proposed that they will be reduced to 12%, which is a 14.3% reduction. The general rate would be reduced to 10% in 2013, which is a further 16.7% reduction. Regrettably, and I say this "regrettably" for those corporations that could use the assistance, it's not in the budget. Too bad.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently, as I always do, to my old friend my colleague the member from Pickering-Scarborough East. He came up through the same ranks as I did, from municipal politics. We were mayors at the same time. I often listen to what he has to say, particularly around economic issues, because it has been our responsibility and our duty and, I guess, our privilege to serve in this Legislature for pretty much the same amount of time. He found himself on the finance committee, as I did. We travel the province yearly to listen to what people have to say in terms of the finances and then we offer our advice, as the committee, to the Minister of Finance. I have to say, and he will recognize this and perhaps give some credence or some discussion to it in his rebuttal comments, that we made a number of recommendations, first of all, that the finance committee did not buy into because it was Liberal dominated, but secondly, in terms of what the opposition was suggesting—the way this government and finance minister should come forward with a new budget—none of which were listened to.

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When I heard him say today that he wants to know what the members opposite are thinking, that opportunity prevailed and that opportunity was possible for him throughout all those times in November, December and January in the snows, when we were out there talking to ordinary people, when they were telling us what they really wanted, when the poor came forward and said that what they really wanted was an increase in the ODSP and the Ontario Works rates because people were starving, literally starving, with the monies that they were given—only to see reflected here in the budget another paltry 2%. This government has never been able to get away from that.

That's all the time will allow me, but with all respect, we've given you what we think of this budget long before it was presented.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Rick Johnson: I'd like to thank the member from Pickering-Scarborough East for his insightful comments on the budget. Last Thursday's budget was a bold move in these trying economic times.

As the member said, the budget reduces taxes for 93% of Ontarians and supports those who need it most. The government could have sat back and made cuts, as

previous governments have done, but we chose to invest in Ontario.

In my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, I attended the Lindsay and District Chamber of Commerce Evening of Excellence dinner last Thursday. I had the opportunity to talk with many local business people, and the vast majority of people I spoke to applauded the bold moves that the government has taken. The head of the Kawartha Lakes economic development association, Andrew Wallen, says that this budget is good for business and good for my community.

I greatly appreciate the comments that were made earlier, and I believe that this government is taking the steps that are required in these trying economic times.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Pickering-Scarborough East should know that this government has done anything but be straightforward with the people of Ontario.

What we're really concerned about here today is that these are a series of post-dated cheques. That's what these really are. In fact, it's not just the cheques to deflect your attention from the costs and distract you; the timing of the cheques that will come into your home is slightly before the next election. That's got to tell you something.

The other thing is the amount: When they say \$1,000, that's basically telling you that the cost will likely be in excess of that, probably a couple of thousand dollars, because they will never give you all of your own money back.

I'm concerned. We had a meeting. We had three different accounting firms in my riding of Durham on Friday morning: Hobb & Company, BDO Dunwoody—they interpreted the budget—as well as a small business group which had a chartered accountant there. They said, "You know, this is going to affect the people who can least afford it. This is going to affect small business, those businesses under \$50,000 to \$100,000 in revenue." These are home-based businesses, people who have been unemployed and are looking for a second career.

Every single thing a person of modest means does, right from paying their hydro bill, their heating bill, their telephone bill—all of them are going up. It's tragic. We figured it out. We have analysts who looked at this, and they would say that something in the order of \$25 a week of additional—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Now, the government and indeed the minister are saying—and they're laughing at this. These are honest people who are being trashed by this government. They're reaching into your other pocket—not the health care pocket; that's \$3 billion—and taking \$25 a week. You should be very leery—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

I'll now return to the member for Pickering-Scarborough East, who has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I certainly want to thank the members from Haldimand–Norfolk, Beaches–Each York, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and Durham for their comments.

Very quickly in the limited time, one has to look at the history first to see that our business education tax reductions are scheduled over a period of time, and those continue; our capital tax reductions are scheduled over time, and those continue, as well as the fact that we expedited the manufacturing, forestry and mining sectors on those fronts a year ago. So one needs to look to that history to see how one stages tax reduction so that everyone can adjust to it and plan accordingly.

To my friend from Beaches–East York, the ODSP and the OW, again, have been increased this year—I think we missed one out of our budgets in which there wasn't an increase, but we've been consistent in providing some growth in that area. The Ontario child benefit is going to come into full effect some two years ahead of schedule. That is very significant to lower- and modest-income families and their children. The minimum wage rose, I believe it's today, by 75 cents. We will be some 50% higher than where minimum wage was as we finish that up a year from now.

To my friend from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, thank you for your comments, and I appreciate your being on board for the budget. I know your constituents are looking forward to the many things that will help them.

Finally, to my friend from Durham, whom I've known for many years, he has referenced around when cheques might go out in the context of the rebates that are being provided. There's a point where you're making the transition to a single sales tax. Thus, if it's coming into effect July 1 of next year, it makes sense to provide some dollars roughly ahead of that, at midstream during the first year of implementation and then as the year wraps up. It makes structural sense to provide the money at points in time when it would be most effective. Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I want to just do a sort of review of what we've seen in this budget with the difficult economic times that we've seen around the world and, of course, last fall.

I'm concerned about the consultation on this budget. It goes back to our debate in the House in the fall session last year when the government wanted the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to have their meetings and their consultations before Christmas. Of course, we all know what happened: hardly anyone showed up at the meetings because it was the Christmas season and people hadn't been prepared for that. Normally, stakeholders across the province had been used to working with the government, historically, in the months of January and February.

We were told at that time that it was an emergency to get this out the door; we had to meet quickly with the

people because we all knew the situation in Ottawa at that particular time. What was happening was that the federal government was bringing down their budget, and they made a commitment to bring it down in late January. So we obviously thought, with this consultation that really didn't take place, that we would call the House back and do a provincial budget sometime in mid-to-late February. What actually happened in the end was that the House came back in mid-February, but we didn't have the budget until last week. So we never really saw that consultation period in January and February that we normally would have seen.

In my own riding, I did a couple of consultations in Midland and Orillia. We had some 40 stakeholders out, and we got a lot of feedback on what people were expecting of the provincial budget. It actually occurred right after the federal budget, so we had good input on the kind of infrastructure dollars that we probably would expect. The fact that the federal government put infrastructure dollars on the table—obviously there's a commitment with the infrastructure programs that we would see the same thing happening at the provincial level, if there were going to be joint agreements.

What we found to be a surprise was that immediately when it was leaked out—and I guess there's no such thing as a secret budget anymore, because we had a series of announcements leading up to last Thursday. What we immediately found the most difficult was that we were going to an \$18-billion deficit by this time next year based on \$3.9 billion for the year that ends today and a \$14.1-billion projection that will end a year from today, adding to a total of \$18 billion.

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The biggest problem—we on this side of the House have promoted the reduction in corporate business taxes. There's no question about that; we support that. If we could divide the budget into sections that we would vote on, we would support that particular section of the budget. Unfortunately, we can't support the whole budget, obviously.

It's such a joke when you see the Minister of Finance making a fool of himself day after day, talking about, "Why did you not vote for the budget?" Obviously, that's why you wouldn't do that. We would not vote for a budget if we didn't agree with everything in the budget. As I said, if it was a separate vote on business taxes, we'd be there to support it.

If I had a choice of things that I thought were positive in the budget, I would applaud the fact that you have some personal income tax savings there. That's not a problem, because people take that money and reinvest it in their families. That's what we believe in. And you know what? As the member from Uxbridge mentioned, if it affects us and we pay a little bit more in provincial taxes, it's not the end of the world. I don't hear people screaming around the room for people in our category of income.

I also want to say that I would support the increases in apprenticeship training, and tax credits for that particular

sector. But what I won't support is—why are you not changing the apprenticeship ratio? Here we are, talking about job creation. We want to compare ourselves to the rest of the country—they do this, and all these harmonizations take place in the Maritimes, but the apprenticeship ratio in the Maritimes is 1 to 1. What is it here in Ontario? It's 3 to 1. Why does Ontario have to be different from the rest of the country? We continually bring this up. They brag about the apprenticeship tax credit, but when it comes to ratios, where you can bring more young men and women into trades, they turn a blind eye on the people.

That's all I support in it.

Interjections.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is heckling me over there, and he's saying, "What about housing?" Well, you know, it would be great if we'd actually see something happen in housing, but we don't see it. It takes forever to get something off the ground. Take a look. Take—

Hon. Jim Watson: Walk down the street.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Well, you can walk down the street. The problem is—and the minister should know this, and it's what all of the stakeholder groups are saying as well—the time frame is way, way too slow. There's way too much red tape. There's too much red tape, too many consultants involved. The next thing you know, one year goes by, two years go by, three years go by, and at the end of five years, you finally see a 30-unit building up, or a 30-unit renovation.

Something that the Minister of Municipal Affairs could provide to this House in a quarterly report is, how many have you opened? Tell us, in a quarterly report, how many have started and how many have been completed. That's what I would like to see, because as far as I'm concerned, the process is very, very slow.

Now let's talk about the harmonization for a while. The harmonization—

Hon. Jim Watson: It's on our website.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: To the minister: I've had two projects in my riding, and it has taken five years to get each one of them built. Most of the money is gone, and most of the time has been held up by your ministry and by Canada Mortgage and Housing. They are not streamlined to build affordable housing. That's the problem with the system. If you can streamline that system, you'll be a hero. Anyway—

Hon. Jim Watson: Stop attacking the municipal sector.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Well, no, a developer wouldn't take that long. The process we use for affordable housing is much too slow, as far as I'm concerned. It would be nice to see quarterly reports, or a biannual report, on just how many are started and where they are in their phases of completion.

But the harmonization is what I want to chat about for a minute. The government, of course, has waffled all over the place on harmonization, and eventually decided to implement it with this \$1,000 rebate. We call it

something else. You're not supposed to use this particular word; it sounds like "tribe." It's a rebate of \$1,000. And of course we all know that one payment comes due shortly before the election in 2011. That wouldn't be anything that the government would plan intentionally; we know that. They're much too honourable to plan something like that.

My understanding is that when the Maritime provinces put in harmonization, they reduced the percentage of the provincial sales tax. They didn't have to give back a rebate. They just made it more affordable for the people.

I know the leader of the third party and I thank her for her comments in her speech. But there are a number of things I want to put on the record. I think people throughout the province should know just what new things they're being taxed on. I'm getting different feedback from my constituents in my e-mails and my letters than what the member from Uxbridge was getting. He was getting all these positive e-mails, and I think the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock went to the chamber of commerce and everybody was positive up there. I guess there were no real estate agents, lawyers or accountants at that one, because I'm hearing just the opposite. By the way, Minister, while I'm here on the floor I do want to congratulate the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. We share a very large boundary, and no doubt you'll be hearing about quarries and water taking permits very shortly. I hear about them all the time and I'm quite sure you'll hear about them as well, and maybe we can work together on that.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I didn't see you up there. Were you up there at the by-election?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: We're not talking about by-elections here.

Interjections.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Excuse me, Mr. Speaker.

Interjection: The heckling should refer to the bill.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm trying to concentrate on my speech.

Hon. Jim Watson: Garfield, when were you up in Kawartha?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: March 5.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Okay, order.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Some of the things that are included in the harmonization that haven't been included in the past: all of our gasoline and our fuels; conferences and seminars for small organizations or large organizations that want to attend a small conference or seminar somewhere—they'll be paying tax on that from now on; any adult footwear costing \$30 or less; prepared foods, a hot dog for \$4—you'll have to pay tax on that now; new homes get a partial rebate; tobacco, which I don't have a problem with but a lot of people would; personal services; hairstylists; dry cleaning; car washing; engine shampooing; veterinarian care; professional services; rental of commercial properties; real estate commissions; newspapers and magazines; taxi fares; limousine fares; admissions under \$4; Internet access fees; landscaping; golf green fees; postal stamps; courier fees; home reno-

ventions—so that sort of takes away from Mr. Flaherty's tax credit on home renovations; domestic air travel; audio books for the blind; gym fees—here we are trying to promote a healthy lifestyle, and now the first thing we do, after the Minister of Health Promotion has made all these fancy announcements of what she's going to do, is announce that we're going to tax gym fees; and of course homes over \$500,000. There's a number of others. I brought up one in the House the other day that came from a very strong businessperson in my community, Josl Huter, from Mount St. Louis Moonstone ski resort, who phoned our office, very upset over the fact that even lift tickets at a ski resort would be taxed as well.

Something else that is very important that we have to mention here is just what will happen to our deficit. This is where, as a parent and grandparent, I am very concerned about our children's futures. I think everybody sort of plays that card one way or the other when they're thinking, "Well, we're all here for the benefit of Ontarians and future Ontarians, but I'm someone who doesn't like debt. I like to have my Visa card paid up. I like to have all my bills paid. I feel comfortable that way." So when I see these numbers, they scare me: in 2009-10, another \$14.1 billion; 2010-11, \$12.2 billion; 2011-12, \$9.7 billion; 2012-13, \$8 billion; 2013-14, \$5.8 billion; 2014-15, \$3.1 billion. Finally, and that's if everything's going perfectly, they say that it'll be zero. But counting next year's budget this coming year, they'll add \$53 billion to the provincial debt until the year 2015-16. Those are scary numbers because, at that point, the accumulated debt will be over \$200 billion.

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So all these fancy announcements, this infrastructure, the \$32 billion that we're announcing for these great projects across the province—and I agree; many of them are needed and will be very worthy projects, but one of things we have to remember is, our children are paying for this. These are loans against the future. Our kids are paying for these bills. We have to be reminded of that and keep in mind that it took 136 years, from 1867 to 2003, to get provincial spending to \$67 billion. It has taken six years, from 2003 to 2009, to add another \$42 billion on top of that. That's the kind of money these guys are spending, and then they're estimating another \$40 billion on top of that.

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: You can heckle me all you want because you're history in 30 months. You're out of here. You will be out of here. The people will not put up with this kind of nonsense—

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Can you not muzzle that?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the member for Simcoe North to withdraw that comment.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I reluctantly withdraw it.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the House to come to order and allow the member for Simcoe North to make his comments without heckling.

I would return to the member for Simcoe North.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: So what I am saying is, they've added \$50 billion plus another \$40 billion—\$90 billion in their term if they were to actually ever survive to 2016.

Interjections.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: You can heckle all you want over there. You can heckle till the cows come home. The reality is, you're spending our children's future. That's what you're doing.

Hon. Jim Watson: King of the downloaders.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Well, you've got the numbers. Should I repeat them to the general public—136 years to get to \$67 billion; six more years of Liberal government to get to \$42 billion.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the member for Huron-Bruce and the member for Peterborough will please come to order and stop heckling the member for Simcoe North.

I return to the member for Simcoe North.

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: They don't want to talk about what they're leaving. Anybody can talk about fancy spending. Anybody can talk about the fact that you're spending \$100 billion here or \$30 billion here. What they don't want to admit, though, is, this is our children's money they're spending. They're putting it on the credit card, Mr. Speaker. You know that, I know that and everybody in this House knows that. That's why it's disappointing.

Where is that money going to be spent? For example, I would like to see some money spent on basic literacy programs. It's an area where the government says they're going to spend money. I work with community-based programs all the time. We've passed a resolution in this House asking for more money to be spent on this particular area. The government agreed to it in this House, so now we're going to watch and see if this government—the Dalton McGuinty government that says they believe in basic literacy and programs for the underprivileged etc.—will actually turn to that.

There are 300,000 manufacturing jobs lost in this province. Many of those people who have lost those jobs have had 20, 30 years' experience in those particular jobs. That's all they've ever done. They do not have the basic literacy skills to communicate in a modern job in a modern society, so they need basic training. The Second Career program is not covering it at all. If anyone supports anything in this House today, I would ask that the one thing you do support is basic literacy programming and additional funding for it. Most of them are ready to close their doors by the middle of next month because their enrolments are up, they're turning people away at the door and they basically have no money to operate.

Most of the work in these programs is done by volunteers who help other people in their community learn to read and write properly, to fill out resumés, that sort of thing. If there's one thing we can add to this debate in a

non-partisan manner, because I know that a lot of it has been partisan—and I make partisan comments the odd time myself, but the reality is, I do hope you will all listen to that, because you've got to be hearing it from the communities. There are 111 of these agencies. You've got to be hearing at home how they're suffering. I've worked with them over the last few months, and I'm passionate to see more money put in those particular areas.

I'm sorry I've only got two minutes left. I know that those on the opposite side would like to hear me speak a lot longer.

There are a number of areas that, if we are going to spend our children's future, we have to spend money on very carefully.

Just this week, I talked to the Minister of Infrastructure. A program that got turned down for the Building Canada fund was the Lake Simcoe Regional Airport out of Oro-Medonte. It's owned by the township of Oro-Medonte, in the city of Barrie. We thought it was an automatic pass for a Building Canada grant. It got turned down for some reason.

Hon. Jim Watson: Where's John Baird? He didn't support it.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Yeah, well, what we're hearing—and this is back to the minister as well; and you can check with the people in your ministry—is that it was at the provincial level that it got turned down.

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Let's get that straightened out, because I've got a commitment from the federal member and from Mr. Baird that the Lake Simcoe Regional Airport program should go ahead. If you're saying over there that it's a dual problem, let's get it resolved. We're talking about economic development for a Places to Grow location, which is the city of Barrie, one of the fastest-growing cities in Ontario. The airport will be built 10 kilometres outside of the city. And you know what? It's an automatic to have Building Canada funding. I know there's a stimulus grant that the federal government is putting out as well. If you can do anything to make that happen, it will make a lot of happy campers up in that particular area, because economic development and expanded runways at airports are very, very positive.

That is really all I've got to say today. I wish I could have another 20 minutes because I've got pages of stuff I never got to, but I do appreciate the fact that we can speak to this. I applaud my members—I know a lot of my other members here will want to speak. We're going to be here speaking on this for days, so stay tuned. Some of us may want to substitute for others, with the leadership thing going on, so maybe we'll be asking for unanimous consent on that.

Thank you very much. I appreciate it very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I tried to listen intently to the member for Simcoe North; I really did—and I do commend the Speaker for intervening on at least a couple of

occasions, because even though there's a scant 20 of us here today, or 22, I counted at one point, the catcalls and the heckling, I think, to him was unmerciful. I don't remember having someone, other than in question period, heckled quite so much as the poor member from Simcoe North. The fact that he was able to continue with his speech at all is a real testament to him.

I listened to what he was saying, trying to make some sense—and I would acknowledge that he did deviate from time to time, but given the circumstances, it is not surprising. He was trying to talk about what was happening in his riding. That was the most interesting part to me: trying to find out what was happening in Simcoe North, trying to find out where he thought the expenditures of government money should be and how they might be better spent. I'm not sure that I was able to understand everything he had to say. I hope that the members opposite understood, because they were hardly giving him a chance to come out and say it.

Having said all of that, I commend the member for attempting valiantly to get his point of view across. I am not sure that this House will grant him the rare exception of being able to speak a second time. I am sure that there will be at least one nay, should he attempt to do so. In any event, he has put his mark on this debate, and I commend him for giving it a very game try.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I would have given my spot for the minister—but thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to the member from Simcoe North. The member, in the earlier part of his comments—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Will the government members please come to order and allow the government member to make his two-minute comment?

I return to the member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The member from Simcoe North, in the earlier part of his comments, talked about how voting against a budget is not a vote against every single measure that is announced in the budget but some particular aspect, and I have heard that from some other members of the opposition as well.

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It will be nice to hear, then, which part of the past and present budgets the member actually likes. They're quick to highlight the parts they don't like; it will be nice to know which parts they do like. Do they like the part where there is a \$32.5-billion infrastructure stimulus in this budget? Do they like the fact that there is about \$750 million for job creation and skills training in the budget? Do they like the fact that there is a comprehensive tax reform package in this budget which reduces corporate income taxes across the board and significantly reduces personal income taxes—or is it the fact that the government is spending money on reducing poverty through the Ontario child benefit, or \$1.2 billion in terms of investment in affordable housing?

All of these things in this budget present a balanced point of view towards enhancing our economy, towards making sure that we not only look after our families and our businesses today in this economically challenging climate but also in the long term, putting fundamental principles in place so that this economy grows.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: It was a good speech by the member from Simcoe North. He reiterated one thing we do like: We do support corporate business tax cuts. What we lament is that there aren't any in the 2009 budget. This government is not even going to look at a general corporate income tax rate cut until July 1, 2010. No one is refuting this. We asked the Minister of Finance about this today; this issue is not being refuted.

We need small business. We know we've lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs in recent history. Small business corporate tax rates should have been cut in this budget. All we got was a promise—and I do point out that what you see in the budget speech and what you see in the budget papers are two different things.

I get phone calls. A number of small businesses are of the understanding that they are getting a corporate tax rate cut during this 2009 budget. That's not going to happen. All they've received is a promise: "Wait till next year. Wait for a future budget." In the budget speech, the date was actually identified: July 1, 2010. That is not this budget. That's not the budget year that commences tomorrow morning. Small business is the backbone. We have two different issues here: a budget speech and the budget itself.

The other major area where we should have seen corporate tax cuts was with respect to manufacturing and processing, whether it be fishing down on Lake Erie, farming, mining, forestry, auto or US Steel. There are no corporate tax cuts for any of those groups until a future budget—not this budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I'd like to take a chance to comment on the member from Simcoe's speech on the budget. For the Liberals and the governing party to understand this, he did come out with some of the good things he thought were there. What he's trying to understand is: How do we pay for these things? It certainly is going to be your kids who pay.

But I want to go back to 1990, when I first was elected here. Do you know something? We were in trouble in 1990, and guess who was in government before that? The Liberals. All of the sudden we had the NDP in power, and they thought they could spend their way out of it, finding out that they couldn't do that after five years of a \$10-billion deficit, putting another \$50 billion onto our debt.

Now we're right here—déjà vu. We've had five years of Liberal government, and now—guess what?—we're in trouble all over again. We still have a Liberal government in here and they've said, "We can spend our way

out of this, but we will beat the NDP. We'll beat them; we'll spend more money than they did. We'll put ourselves into a bigger debt than they did"—and that's exactly what you're doing. You've got to remember—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'll give you some extra time. I would ask the government members to please come to order and allow the member to make his comments. I can't hear him, and he's right over there. Please come to order.

Member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Obviously, as did the previous speaker, we've hit a sore note and they woke up over on the other side. But, guys, wake up to what you're doing to us.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Did anyone on the government side hear me when I asked them to come to order and allow the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound to make his comments? If you didn't, I would like to ask you again.

I return to the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I don't have a lot of time as it is. I even had a question in the House today, and you couldn't answer the question. Now you've come up with a bill that we're going to have to vote on, and you tell us that we should vote for everything in this bill, but you can't do that. You people have got to learn from 1990, what happened there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

I'll return to the member for Simcoe North. I'd ask the member for Durham to come to order first, and then I'll return to the member for Simcoe North, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to thank the members for Beaches–East York, Ottawa Centre, Haldimand–Norfolk and Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for their comments.

There are parts of the budget, and I mentioned them in my earlier comments, that I thought were positive, and I think that's probably the same with any budget that has ever been delivered in this House. There are obviously things that we agree with and that we disagree with, although when there's only one budget vote, you vote with your party and how you feel. I can't look at this budget and not think about my three little granddaughters and what it will mean with a \$200-billion debt after 2015-16. That's important to me as a family person.

But I'd like to go back to comments made by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and I really would like to meet up with you and some staff people on the Lake Simcoe Regional Airport in Barrie, because—and I go back to the Building Canada fund—this particular township, led by Mayor Harry Hughes and his assistant, Robin Dunn, and the airport commission thought they had put together a complete package. They had worked over a year on getting a proposal together, and they were

shut out of this particular application, thinking that the airport was good for economic development in an area serving the city of Barrie, which is the fastest-growing city in Ontario. That's the kind of thing I'm pleased to see infrastructure money spent on, because it will create jobs. If we can meet up with you again, and Mr. Baird, whatever we have to do at the federal level, we will do our very, very best to make this project come to completion.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate everybody's—sometimes in this House we get a little overanxious at times. I apologize to Ms. Mitchell for any comments I made to her, and again, I look forward to further debate in this House. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: It's a pleasure to be here this afternoon, in spite of the fact that this House has been rather rambunctious today. I will attempt to give my 20-minute thoughts on the process that has unfolded and what we have found here in the budget.

This budget process lasts a long time. As I said earlier today, it started back in November when the finance committee, and separately the finance minister, started to travel the province to listen to ordinary Ontarians on what they were hoping would be in this budget speech and in this budget bill. We listened intently—at least I know I did, and I think most of the members of the finance committee did as well—to what people had to say.

They talked about the level of poverty and the ongoing poverty in this province. We heard, I think, more people on that issue than any other issue.

We heard from students talking about the debt load that many students are having to endure when they finish school. We heard about underfunding of educational institutions, particularly those in post-secondary education. We heard from colleges and universities on the need for funding.

In northern Ontario, we heard about the special needs of the north. We heard about the job losses. We heard about the forestry industry, the mining industry, and the many difficulties of living in northern Ontario.

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So, of course, we waited for the big day, which came last week, when the finance minister stood up, hoping against hope that some of these issues would be contained within the budget bill, would be contained within his approximately 45-minute speech, that he would give special credibility to what the people of Ontario told the finance committee and, I'm sure, individually what many of them told him as well.

We looked as well at the numbers. I've been at this quite a while. The first thing is, I open up to the two pages that show the revenues the government has coming in or are anticipated to come in, and then the expenditures—where they're probably going to expend the money during the fiscal year—and I was quite surprised.

On the revenue side, the government actually shows getting about the same amount of money as—possibly

more money than—they got last year. This is in spite of the fact that the economy in North America, particularly our neighbours to the south, has imploded. This is in spite of the fact that we have unemployment rates in places like Windsor running at 15% and 18%. This is in spite of the fact that we have potential job losses in the auto sector that are going to affect tens of thousands of people. In spite of the fact that we've lost 300,000 jobs in this province, we have, on the revenue side, interim expenditures for 2008-09, which ends tomorrow, and it's the best guesstimate they can make, of \$93.427 billion. An anticipated plan—excuse me—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: Actual—yeah, okay. That's the interim for 2008-09 of \$93.427 billion. That's the revenues. The expenditures which they have for this interim year are \$97.317 billion. That's all well and good. The minister has explained that there's a deficit of about \$4 billion. But I looked for the plan for 2009-10: This government actually shows a revenue increase that's going to accrue to the province of Ontario of up to \$95.980 billion. It shows that in taxation revenue, it's going to decline ever so slightly. In terms of the government of Canada, it's going to increase by some \$3 billion. In terms of income from investment, including all kinds of things like the lottery and the liquor control board, it's actually going to go up nearly \$1 billion. It shows, as well, increases in other non-tax revenue.

I'm not sure where the government comes off with such rosy figures. I am not sure, seeing what is happening in this province, seeing what is happening in this country, seeing what has happened with our biggest trading partner immediately to the south, with all of the job losses, the revenue losses, the banks being bailed out, AIG being bailed out, the Detroit Big Three being bailed out, where the government thinks that the revenues are going to stay approximately the same or even increase. That's the first question I have to ask myself: Are the government's revenue expectations likely to be met? I would have to suggest that this is looking pretty rosy. I don't imagine that the government's going to do this well. I hope you do, but I don't imagine that it's going to happen.

The second thing I looked at is the following year and how much they're going to spend. The plan is to spend \$108.880 billion, which would result in a revenue shortfall of some \$13 billion, which the finance minister explained.

So I started to look, and I thought: "Where are they going to spend this \$13 billion? Where is it going to happen?" As I looked through the expenditures—and I invite all of you to look at them—some of it is not being expended at all. There is nearly \$4 billion on the following page for contingencies, because I think the government understands that the revenue expectations might be askew.

Then I started to look to where the other monies were going to be expended—and there are some worthwhile projects. No one's going to deny that our roads, sewers, highways, transit, schools, hospitals and everything else

need expenditures. They need money. They need to be refurbished. Our housing needs to be refurbished. Our cities need to be refurbished, and this is probably not a bad time.

But I look at what is not there and I look at the disappointment that I have every single time there has been a budget from this government. I knew the Mike Harris Tories. I was here when they were here, not for a long time, but probably a good time. I was here to watch what they did with the poor. I was here to watch what they did to people who didn't really have an opportunity. I saw that there wasn't a single increase in minimum wages over the entire period. I saw that there were no increases over the entire period to those who are most destitute—those on ODSP, general welfare, Ontario Works—the whole range of people who are the most destitute.

So I was hoping against hope that this government might be a little different. I knew in my heart of hearts that they wouldn't do the same thing I would do, because I'm a New Democrat and they're not. I knew they wouldn't help the poor as much as I would help them, but I was hoping against hope that they would do something. When the minister and the Premier announced last year that they were going to start helping the poor, I got my real hopes up, but I have to tell you they've been dashed.

What this government has done very cleverly is look at what poor they're going to help. They're only going to help one group of the poor. They have earmarked that they are going to help poor children. Do I begrudge \$42 a month to a poor child? I do not. Do I think you should give \$42 a month to a poor child? I do. But I also have to ask all of you, do you think those are the only people in this province who are poor? Do you think it's only poor children who are poor? Do you not know that the biggest number of people in this province who are poor are the disabled, those who are on ODSP? You must know in this province the biggest group of people who are growing into poverty. It's called the colour of poverty. Recent immigrants, people of colour and our First Nations communities tend to be far poorer and live in poverty than all the other groups.

So when I look in a budget at what this government is going to do about poverty, I don't just look at what you're going to do for children. I look at what you're going to do for all of the rest. I have to tell you that this budget profoundly disappoints me. It disappoints me to the core.

In his 3,000-word speech, the Minister of Finance uttered the word "poverty" only once, and this is what he said. He called achieving the government's poverty reduction goal an "uphill trek." He said it was difficult. It wasn't difficult in his 3,000-word speech to give away billions of dollars to the corporate sector, and maybe they need the money. It wasn't difficult in his 3,000-word speech to say how he's going to build infrastructure. It wasn't difficult in his 3,000-word speech to talk about how he is going to change the whole regimen of taxation in Ontario and have a harmonized sales tax. But it was an "uphill trek" for him to do something to help those

people in our society who are poor, unless of course they were children.

The government has always said it would build a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy on the child benefit; I grant that. If increasing the child benefit in last week's budget—where is the comprehensive strategy? That's what I'm talking about. The only other significant action was to match federal funds to repair 50,000 social housing units and build 4,500 new units for seniors and people with disabilities. Again, I welcome the action. Is it enough? Not enough—not for me and not for the people who rely on new, clean and decent housing.

But let's put all of this in perspective. The government is repairing social housing, where only 5% of Ontarians live. Only 5% of Ontarians live in social housing, and only a small fraction of those people who are poor live in social housing, are lucky enough—who are not on the waiting list—to have found a decent place to live which is borne on the income they have. Other than that, there is nothing to help low-income Ontarians who live in private rental housing. There are a few dollars for non-senior households, even though the latest numbers from Statistics Canada show that more than one in four Ontario households are precariously housed. Yes, the McGuinty government should be matching federal housing dollars. I think so. I'm glad you're finally doing it. Instead of just spending their money, you're finally ponying up some of our own as well. It's time that this was done. But they also need to add new provincial dollars to meet the housing needs that have been ignored and neglected by the federal government and by your government in the past four and a half years. The Alberta government recently announced a bold \$3.2-billion plan to end homelessness in that province, which in equivalent terms would equal more than \$12 billion for Ontario, because they are a province of far fewer people and, in spite of their oil, far less resources. That's 24 times what the McGuinty government committed in this budget; they are spending 24 times more per capita on homelessness and housing for their population than we are spending or are committed to in this budget. If you want to know what disappoints me, it's looking to what they are able to do and are willing to do and what we are not doing.

1750

What about the increase in the child benefit? Sure, it's good. But are there any strings attached? That's what I want to know, because last year when the government announced this new plan, this new child benefit, it also came with some downfalls. When the benefit was increased in July 2008, the government cut off the back-to-school allowance, the winter clothing allowance; cut the basic allowances by \$125 a month so that a single mom and child were exactly \$1 ahead. Now, I want to know: You're giving \$42; what are you taking away? I haven't found it yet, but I'm sure there's something taken away, because the last time that child benefit took away everything, save and except \$1. That was \$1 they had to put food on the table, pay the rent, buy clothing and pay school fees. Was that good enough? I don't think so. When the Premier stood up today and talked about the

child in swimming lessons and the parents who had \$16,000 a year and were now going to get the equivalent of a few extra dollars, \$42 a month, \$500 a year, then it still meant that that family had \$16,500 to spend, not \$16,000. Were they still living in poverty? Of course they were. Could they use the \$400 or \$500? Of course they could. Was it a real, significant down payment to that family? It was not. It's just not good enough.

The Toronto Star editorial stated clearly on Saturday that the McGuinty government budget falls short on reducing poverty. We know that poverty is degrading, and we know that something could be done, and I can only hope that this government will some day understand that it is not just children who are poor and it is not just children who are deserving of our support.

I especially want to talk about the disabled. We invested a fair amount of time in this Legislature last year on the topic of Bill 77. Bill 77 was about services for persons with developmental disabilities. I remember the heady discussions. I remember the government opposite talking about how this bill was going to free up the developmentally disabled and their families; was going to give them options they've never had before; was going to give them the right to contract themselves with service providers so that their children could be better looked after, so that it could be done in the home so that they wouldn't have to be in institutions.

Now, with tomorrow being—I'm trying to think of the word—community development day and many developmentally delayed adults being here, I think it behooves me to talk about what this government has not done, what you have not done for Bill 77, because I looked throughout this budget knowing full well that the minister and the government committed itself to finding the necessary funds to assist those with developmental disabilities, to make this bill a real possibility, to give opportunities where the opportunities have not been had before. I listened to the debate around it in this House, but I also listened to the people, the hundreds of people who came before the committee as it travelled around in places across this province, people with tears in their eyes saying, and they said it eloquently and right, they loved the bill; they wanted the bill to succeed; they believed the bill was the best opportunity for their families. But the whole thing would come down to: What is this government going to do in this budget? What was the government going to do to make sure that the money is there, to make sure that this new opportunity for their children, their families and themselves is going to see the light of day?

And do you know something? I looked in here, and I have to tell you I had tears in my eyes, because there is

nothing here. The actual expenditures for community and social services, the interim 2008-09, was \$8.3 billion. For next year, there is a 2.9% increase, up to \$8.327 billion. That 2.9% increase corresponds almost exactly to the wage increase that has been granted to workers. Where is the money for this new program? Where are the lofty expectations that were given so freely here last summer and last fall when we talked about this? It's not here in this budget.

A person who lives with a developmental disability gets \$999 a month from this government. That's what they get to live on. That's \$12,000 a year, approximately \$8,000 below the poverty line. The government can talk all it wants about giving them a 2% increase. That 2% increase equates to almost nothing. It equates to \$20 a month, \$240 a year. So now they're not going to be \$8,000 under the poverty line; they're going to be \$7,760 under the poverty line. That's all you have accomplished for those who were born disabled and those who became disabled. They're having a lifetime of poverty.

I asked in finance and in estimates—because I'm very concerned about this—how much the government makes in clawing back the monies of those persons who have the temerity, the unmitigated gall, to go out and try to find a job even though they're disabled. We have all seen them. We have seen people with Down's syndrome, people with other developmental issues, in the stores putting cans on the shelves. I've seen them sweeping. I've seen them working at McDonald's. I also know that this government claws back half of all the money they make. I've asked the minister, how much? You take \$85 million off them. That's what you do. I'm looking in this budget to see what you're going to do to let them keep that money.

There is nothing in here for the disabled. There is nothing in here for the poor. There is nothing.

So don't you tell me, members opposite, how great it is that you're giving \$42 a month to children. I'll tell you that's great. Tell me what you're doing for the rest of them. Tell me what you're doing for the new immigrants. Tell me what you're doing for the First Nations community. But most especially, tell me what you're doing for the disabled, because as I read this budget, it is precious little. It is absolutely nothing.

I am ashamed when you say you're doing things for poverty.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being very close to 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1758.

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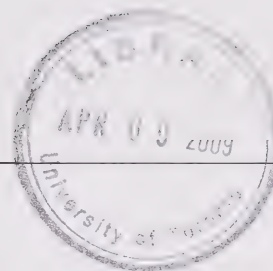


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First Session, 39th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
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**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 1 April 2009

Mercredi 1^{er} avril 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 1 April 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 1^{er} avril 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the Hindu prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREATER TORONTO AND HAMILTON AREA TRANSIT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2009 LOI DE 2009 SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU RÉSEAU DE TRANSPORT EN COMMUN DE LA RÉGION DU GRAND TORONTO ET DE HAMILTON

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 31, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 163, An Act to amend the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority Act, 2006 / Projet de loi 163, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la Régie des transports du grand Toronto.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a real pleasure to be here this morning. I wish I had a couple of extra minutes before I get started, but anyway, Bill 163 is dealing with transit in Ontario, and I have a couple of questions that I want to raise on it. I'm looking through my notes first to see if I can find those questions. They seem to be rushing this bill, or at least they're rushing me on this bill. I'm wondering about that. I'm wondering why they're actually rushing the bill, because an important issue in public policy is to have a properly designed, properly consulted plan for an ambitious, integrated transit system in the province of Ontario.

I'm the new critic, and that's why I'm in a bit of a rush here, because this morning I've been asked to speak for as much time as I can justify, which is another issue, on a bill that our critic, Frank Klees, extensively—he responded to the minister on the date of introduction, which was March 30, and now we're at April 1. It's almost like April Fool's Day in terms of, why is this bill being rushed? We'll refer to some of the things that Mr. Klees said, because I should be clear now: Mr. Klees is a declared candidate in the leadership for the Conservative Party, and I wish him well. He's a very well researched, hard-working intelligent, capable, competent person, as am I.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm saying that because there are probably going to be four people who run, and those four people will probably be Tim Hudak, as announced, Randy Hillier, who's out travelling, and of course, more recently, Frank Klees.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: This ties into the bill, Mr. Levac. It does tie into the bill.

I'm hoping that Durham has a voice, because the transit system in Durham, the infrastructure there is very fragile and it needs to be improved. That's how this ties in, and we need a strong voice. I had been asked to run for leader, but because I'm over 65, some people think I should retire.

Mr. Dave Levac: No.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, that's a good idea. So I've refused to retire, but I am going to support that we need a strong voice for Durham, and that could easily be Wayne Arthurs, for that matter, because he's quite a good member, but he's in the wrong party. But I would say it could be Christine Elliott or Jerry Ouellette. We're going to wait on the decision on that.

But all humour aside, this is an important bill, and I think it's important for a couple of reasons. I did, in the brief time I had yesterday to respond in a couple of minutes, outline a couple of things. Essentially, it does two things. The first thing it does is change absolutely and completely the governance of Metrolinx or the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority. The governance prior to that was, I believe, 11 members. I believe there was a representative from each of the regional municipalities of York, Durham, Halton and Peel. That's four members, and I believe Hamilton had a representative there; I'm not sure how that worked. But the city of Toronto I believe had five members, which would be sort of like David Miller and Adam Giambrone and the big shooters there. Then the chair and the vice-chair were appointed by order in council, by Minister Bradley. Obviously representatives on behalf of the Minister of Transportation and the ministry and the McGuinty government, they were given their marching orders and they went to the board meetings and basically did what the minister wanted, I'm pretty sure.

Rob MacIsaac was the full-time chair and I think worked pretty hard. In fact, I met with him quite a few times when I was critic. They had done a couple of consultation papers. I'll refer to those papers once I get all my notes. I've had a bit of a short time getting prepared here, but I have read the report. We get a lot of reports here, as all members do, and these reports are often an

interesting read on the weekend as you're visiting with friends. This report here is called *The Big Move*. This is a big report, and it's the last report by Metrolinx under the direction of Rob MacIsaac. Rob MacIsaac has not moved on; he's not operating in a full-time capacity now. I think he's the new president of Conestoga College, or one of the colleges, I believe.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Mohawk College.

Mr. John O'Toole: Mohawk. Pardon me. Mr. Arnott can tell me all these things. He's actually from Wellington-Halton Hills. Thanks for that.

The work he did here and in this report—this is quite an ambitious report. The report was recent, November 2008—at least just before December 2008. So it's a very current report. In fact it's the big plan for transit. I had some problems with it. The plan has been in the works for some time. The plan was to build 1,200 kilometres of rapid transit, more than triple what exists now, so that over 80% of the residents in the region will live within two kilometres of rapid transit, and with an emphasis on areas with large populations of seniors and low-income individuals that rely on transit to get around daily. Good for the environment, good for the citizenry. Who's got a problem with that? I just want to say this for sure: There is a plan to the extent that MacIsaac and the Metrolinx group have worked on it, and they worked on it. Respectfully, this is the deal: The representatives I described, whether it's Bill Fisch from York region or Gary Carr from Halton or Joyce Savoline, who used to be the chair, so she was probably on it for a while—she's a member here now and a very strong member—or Roger Anderson from the region of Durham, along with the David Miller and the other people—Mr. Smith was on GO Transit and I think he was on there as well—did a lot of work.

0910

"The Big Move is about values" as much about the environment as it is about having a transit plan. They worked "with over 100 priority actions and supporting policies. It moves the yardsticks in a wide range of transportation areas. Benefits will be widespread. It will help people get to the places they need to go more quickly, allowing them to spend more time on what is really important. Average commute times will decrease." This would be good, because I commute from Durham region, generally on a daily basis. It's about an hour and 10 minutes. That's once you're on the train and once you get off the train, and then you have to take the subway from Union Station up to here. I generally walk. This morning I'm actually quite heated up because of this speech, of course, but more importantly, because it's a long walk and I had a topcoat on, and it's a little bit warm.

But transit affects all our lives. We would not want to be perceived as opposed. This is the key message on behalf of our leader, Bob Runciman, and other leaders who may emerge in the next few months.

"More residents will be able to access jobs that were once inconvenient to reach by transit, while integrated fares and leading edge information systems"—here's the real crux of the problem. We've just started to get into

the detail here. Why did they do this? What is the rush? This remains as a prevailing question, the motive; always look to the motive. Here's my feeling of it: They've tried relentlessly, in open meetings and in closed meetings under Metrolinx, working with the power brokers at the time, and they have been unable to come up with the smart card. Now, the smart card is what this is all about. This may not seem very important to the members here, who aren't all listening—I think it's disappointing that they are not listening—but they can get a copy of Hansard, so that reassures me. The smart card will allow them to do the administration functions which I'll describe briefly here.

When you get on the GO train—and the young people, the pages, are all listening attentively, and they'll likely use transit more reliably and predictably than people from my generation because it's the new way of getting around. I commend you for that. When you get on the train or the bus now, whatever it is, you either present a ticket or a token of some sort. GO Transit has its own system and you usually buy a one-way ticket, a two-way ticket, a weekly pass or a monthly pass. I think a 10-trip ticket is about \$90. Not round trips; that would be five trips in and five trips out. That's basically what I buy each week. It's very important. This part here may be boring but it's important: If I have to get off GO Transit and get onto Durham transit or onto the TTC, I need another ticket—or another person making \$100,000 a year, according to the \$100,000 list this morning—to get a ticket. Do you understand?

What the smart card would do is it would be very much like a credit card. They have them in England. I have a daughter who lives in London, England, and they use the train all the time there. I see the Minister of Transportation is here; I'm very pleased about that. I'm happy he's here because he's actually a fairly decent minister and I know he's working and pushing forward; I question why he's in such a rush here, though. But I'm going to get back on track.

That card is the whole issue here, because now if you have people wanting a seamless transit system from Halton to Durham, and all of the kilometres of rail and bus links in between all have to be paid for and the bus drivers need to be paid, the money has to flow with the people who are using the system. To do that with tickets and transfers and all that stuff is just a bunch of clerks in an office fooling around with paperwork. It's completely redundant, not doable. You'd spend more money trying to transfer the money between the different transit authorities than you'd actually be making.

That's what this whole bill is about, and I would ask the minister to confirm or deny, but that's the barrier. TTC—Toronto Transit or Giambrone—they want to lead the pack. They have the largest transit system in Canada, I understand that, but they have to be part of the solution as well. While at the same time respecting their existing and current infrastructure, they've to get off their duff and start to implement a smart card.

The smart card could be something as simple as like inside a BlackBerry or technology—and you kids will get

this—inside these are what they call a SIM card. A SIM could be used, and is today in some transit systems; you just walk through the stile and it automatically bills you. It's like the 407 highway. You have a transponder and it actually bills you; that's how it's done. It's technology. It's not somebody sitting at a wicket taking tickets—that's finished. When you look at the operating costs, the biggest problem with transit is operating costs. With all due respect, GO Transit operates probably more efficiently than almost any transit system that I've heard of. I think about 80% of the revenue comes from the fare box, which is very good; it's very high. And Vancouver's quite good, but it's not as high as GO Transit. Those jurisdictions I think are what we need to look at and work with. There are systems today in Britain—I talked about London earlier. They have a card that's called the Oyster card. You just pay ahead of time and it just reduces how much is on your card. It's like a cellphone call card. You put in the card and it's been preloaded with so much value. They've got to move on with the system of dealing with the billing and transfer of revenue from the transit system on an integrated transit system.

We're supportive of the objective. We're probably supportive of the new governance model. I say "probably" because I'm going to raise my first concern. Mr. Watson's not here, but Mr. Bradley is. I'm not pointing it out to be mean, but I'm saying that first notice is this: There is a legislative requirement to consult with the municipalities. I'm wondering, was the memorandum of understanding, the MOU, exercised in this regard? Everything I read in the media is that David Miller and those people were taken aback. They were quite surprised that there was no consultation. This is a bit of a storm cloud approaching here on the horizon. It's not a good thing when you start ramming things down people's throat.

With the memorandum of understanding there's no representation on this new board. If you read this report, the Big Move, and I have read it—I was the critic, as I said, so I do like to read things like this that are boring. The reason I say that—

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, you should try to keep up. I know the minister has been briefed on it several times, so he could probably help me here today. It's not likely he will but he could. Because this is the big plan right here. It's been worked out by the board and they were members of the board. I think they agreed on a vision here.

This is the second part; it has a lot to do with the fare card. How are we going to pay for it? I think right now there has been money moved out under this, not directly under the current plan, but Ontario Move 2020 committed \$11.5 billion to begin the implementation of the Big Move and to get shovels in the ground. Often this money is federal, provincial and municipal money. But this plan here is \$50 billion. It calls for a commitment of \$5 billion a year, I believe—the minister can shake his head yes or no—for the next 10 years. That's kind of what they asked for—something in that range, anyway. So it's a fairly large commitment.

Here's the other part: I'm not happy when governments of whatever stripe are in the cabinet signing the paper with the gold pen there. That's very important, these cabinet minutes where they commit to doing these things in law, and the big seal and all those things are used. Here is the key: I want this to be sure to have government input or intervention—not to stop it but right now here is the key: We're going into a bit of a slow-down in the economy; that might be an understatement, but I'd like to understate it a bit. The economy isn't in its best condition right now. If the government has to make choices between the poverty agenda or persons in long-term care and in need of more support—our seniors, our vulnerable—or high municipal taxes, the province has to have the flexibility, at the end of the day, to intervene, make decisions and either support or change its priorities.

0920

I think there will be general agreement—I'm looking at Mr. Sterling, the most senior member here, and Mr. Bradley, and I would say they've been through times where it's tough and you've got to go in; governments make difficult decisions in difficult times. We see Barack Obama making tough decisions about how much he is going to spend. Those aren't always good decisions too. Governments have to sometimes say no to certain commitments.

We saw Premier McGuinty say that the other day. He sort of had a commitment that he was going to do the minimum wage thing, and then he started to—I give him credit for having a compassionate nature and thinking about the poor taxpayer paying for this thing. He said, "You know, I might not do that." But he was quickly whipped into shape. I think Dwight Duncan just about had a heart attack when he said it. Here he was, out pushing the budget, and he's waffling on major principles; he's flip-flopping or whatever they say. I say it in positive terms: I think he was struck by the circumstance of the economy going downhill and him being responsible.

This public policy on minimum wage: Let's think about that for a minute. The government makes these rules and it doesn't cost them a nickel. They sound like they're the heroes. It's the little variety store guy or woman who's paying it, not the government. They make the law; they don't spend the money, but they look like the hero. It's ridiculous. The little guy in the variety store, the family next to where my constituency office is—I often think of Paul and his wife, and they have a son. They work seven days a week; they have no one else but the family to run the store. It's tragic. Talk about employment standards and minimum wage. They'd be lucky to get a wage.

They're forcing them to pay. If they hired someone, what's going to happen? I've been told this by some of the leaders in my community who own the McDonalds and the Tim Hortons. They're the people on the hospital boards and the community living boards; they're the people who are community builders. Don't ever kid yourself: These are the people who are ponying up the money for the new hospital, park or recreation centre. You know that yourself, Mr. Speaker; you've been doing this for a

long time—some would say too long, but that's another issue; that's me I'm talking about.

The issue here is that the minimum wage is an example. How the minimum wage and the poverty agenda tie in is this: We are now transforming transit; we see on St. Clair and other streets in Toronto where the streets are being allocated to transit. I think the best way to encourage people to use transit is to not work on improving gridlock. People won't have any choice; they're going to be stuck in traffic so they'll eventually say, "Reluctantly, I'll get on that train or bus or subway" or whatever it is. That's what they're doing; they're basically making it so that you can't get around. We've heard that in Toronto.

We now have bike lanes on Wellesley. It's quite interesting coming come across Wellesley. It used to be two lanes in each direction, roughly, or portions of it. Often they'd have no parking in rush times so that there would be two lanes of traffic. Now they've got the bike lane. It was quite interesting during the winter. The bike lanes were full of snow. I don't think there are going to be many people riding bikes. I don't think young professional women or young professional men with \$800 Boss suits on are going to be riding their bikes. I think it's a good idea, maybe, in California. Ride your bike if possible; get chains for it or whatever. Now Wellesley is so congested because of the bike lanes—there's nobody in them, by the way; not this morning, because it's raining, or icy or snowing. You might be able to ride a bike probably half of the year. But you've got to have reliable transit too. I think what they're doing is making it so congested that you're going to have to take the bus.

If we follow the model of large cities—one of them is London; I've been there quite a bit, because I have a daughter who lives there and teaches high school there. They have a congestion charge. If you're coming in from Kent—they live in Sevenoaks, which is outside London, and they take the train. But they have driven in, because when they pick people up at the airport and stuff like that, they drive, and they pay a congestion charge. It sort of operates like the 407. As soon as you go in the city—you get a bill the next morning. I think it's about £20; £20 is like \$40. It's expensive, so you don't take your car unless you really have to.

That's what is going to happen here, I think. The minister would be very courageous if he does it, because if they implement that, that would be like implementing the HST. There will be a lot of people against it, even though it's a good idea.

Do you understand? When you do these difficult things—this is when you have to admire leadership that makes difficult decisions, because that's basically why you're elected. Anyone can say yes. Hey, you could send some of the pages in to do that. To say no is the job; that's the job. I've learned, after 25 years of being elected, that it's a difficult decision, which relates back to this: This is the plan—I refer it to people here—it's called The Big Move. It's a big report, and it's called The Big Move. That report lays out a framework and a network of transit links.

How does it relate to John O'Toole and the riding of Durham? This is really where I want to get to the point. I am just amazed that there's nothing in here for us. We're 600,000 people in Durham. There are big parking lots. I've got a plan here. I've met with Smith and MacIsaac and I've told them, I've told the chair of the region of Durham, and now I'm telling the minister: I support the plan and I want to be part of it in a completely non-partisan way. Extend the GO train to Cobourg on the south side of the 401. And all the nodes—this isn't stuff I'm making up. This is the way it works. I took geography in university, and the course I took was urban geography and urban planning. Transit only works when you have density. You have to have density; you have to have people on and off the buses, and density. Europe was developed—the theory was called the central place theory. It's called the Christaller central place theory; that's the academic quote for the book, and that's what it is called. It's built in concentric circles, with dense living.

There is the Places to Grow document, which is a good document by the government. It started under our government, of course, under the ministry. The ministry people lead all this stuff, anyway. Who are we kidding? We just get in the way every four years. Here's the deal, though. The Places to Grow document talks about—the term they use is "intensification," which is code language for "everybody living in a condo." That's what it really means. Individual homes, single residences—all finished. The future is that everybody is going to be living in stacks, in piles, called condos. And transit works good then.

Am I being humorous? No. If you look at the world today, the globe itself, the physical globe—this is all related. The physical globe is this size, and it's not changing. Okay? Well, it is changing, because we're polluting it, destroying it, defacing it, mining it. It's really only this big, but the population is growing, so there's less land and more people. The population in China, I think, is 1.5 billion people. One in every five people is from China or is Chinese. So it's getting bigger, and the deserts are expanding and things like that, so there's going to be more people on less land. How are we going to accommodate them for food and water, clean air and quality of life? They're all going to live in condos, basically. Yes, they're all going to live in stacks. I'm over 65, so it won't be me, but it will be you. How do we deal with this? You're going to have to have a transit system. It doesn't matter what party you belong to.

The population in my riding of Durham currently is about 600,000 people. Let's put that into relative context here. Newfoundland and Labrador is a beautiful province. You see their advertisements on television now: "Visit Newfoundland and Labrador." Newfoundland and Labrador is about 525,000 people. Nova Scotia is a nice, beautiful province. Peggy's Cove and all that stuff is very nice. It's just under 600,000. So they're all smaller than Durham.

0930

Now, let's put this thing into context, into a relative term that we can understand here. The region of Durham

is left out of this plan, basically. We have GO Transit that operates at peak times, that is, morning and evening, and then it runs every hour. In peak times, it runs about every 15 to 20 minutes; in off times, it's every hour or hour and 10 minutes. So if I miss the train, I'm sitting there for an hour. I could be home in an hour and 10 minutes. In non-peak time, my commute time is about an hour and 15 minutes or an hour and 20 minutes, to be fair, each way. That's a long commute, and I commute daily. Some of you probably commute to come here, but I've been doing this for 13 years now. It seems like 100 years.

The issue I'm trying to raise is the plan here is very expensive. If everything goes according to plan, there are going to be more people. Our region is 600,000, as I said. It's forecast, in the 30-year plan, I think, to be just short of a million people. In Toronto or the GTA, where we are, I think it's three and a half million; it's supposed to go to five million people. So there are going to be twice as many people, basically, in the same space. We're going to have to learn how to share the space, whether it's our streets, our parks, our schools or our infrastructure, i.e., transit. That's very important.

To get this thing to work, the minister has taken the courageous move of saying, "I'm going to take control here." That's basically what he's doing. In fact, he's ramming this thing through. He had the leadoff speech the other day and the response from the opposition today, then it will be all done. They'll have this done before we know it. I hope it's going to hearings. I'm looking for a signal from the ministry. Are there going to be public hearings on this, Minister?

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's up to the House leaders.

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes, the House leaders will decide, I'm sure, but we would hope there would be hearings, because there's always some administrvia that's been overlooked in the drafting of the bill.

I think I've made the point that the key thing here is the governance, which we're supportive of—if you're given the authority, take the responsibility as well.

The other thing is the funding. Now the funding isn't as clear, but there are changes here. This is where you get into the Corporations Act and the other things. If the money flows through non-elected people—these are people who are government appointees. Let's face it, Robert Prichard—he's the former president of the University of Toronto, an impeccable person, not to be criticized in any way, but he's a Liberal; there's no question about it.

Hon. David Caplan: What about Roger Anderson?

Mr. John O'Toole: Roger Anderson is now upset, I'm sure. He's not on the board anymore.

Hon. David Caplan: He's not elected.

Mr. John O'Toole: Mr. Caplan points out that the chair of Durham region isn't elected. That has come up from time to time in my region, but let's leave it alone today.

The other point is, though, that there are issues in this bill that I think need to go to committee to be heard. I'm going to go through a few of them here. I said the new board is going to be 15 members, all appointed by

Minister Bradley, and he's specifically going to designate a couple of people. The first chair I believe is going to be Robert Prichard, former president of the University of Toronto, editor and chief of staff at the Toronto Star. I think he got \$1 million or \$2 million to leave that job, which is good.

I look at the \$100,000 list. Holy smokes, some of the public sector—it's just unbelievable. Imagine that: making \$2 million a year. What, are they baseball players, or what is it? I don't get it. I don't think any of us on either side get it. Hockey players I can see, because if they quit scoring goals, they're out of a job the next year; they don't get appointed to some board. That's what happens to most of the deputy ministers when they finish here—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Send them to the Senate?

Mr. John O'Toole: The Senate would be good, too, for anyone who had done the appropriate amount of work to be entitled to the job.

Now there are going to be 15 people on the board. Here's the key: This is absolute power and control here by the minister. It's very specific, tightly worded. I guess they want to take control of Metrolinx. It says, "Under the current act, the chair and vice-chair of the corporation's board of directors are designated by the Minister of Transportation and the corporation's chief executive officer is appointed by the corporation." Rob MacIsaac is the chair, so there you go. He's a great fellow too. "The bill provides that the chair and vice-chair are designated by the Lieutenant Governor in Council on the Minister of Transportation's recommendation." So Minister Bradley interviews a few people, perhaps over lunch or whatever, and eventually they're appointed. They usually go through a pretty serious vetting process.

These are usually outstanding people; there's no question about it. They just have made the wrong choice about which party they support; that's the only problem I have. But in all honesty, they have to appoint competent people. They want to get this right. They want people they can trust and who are competent, so it's the two requirements. "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may redesignate or reappoint the same people when making its first designations of chair...."; in other words, they can be reappointed as well. I read in the media that the new chair, Robert, is going to only be there for a year or so.

"Under the current act, the corporation is divided into divisions...." This is interesting. We're right down into the micro-level issues here in the bill. "The structure of the corporation is amended so that it is no longer required to be divided into divisions." That's probably a good idea for coordination. They have the plan and they've had the technical, the legal, administration and all these different divisions. Now they've got the big plan and they've got to get to work implementing this plan: "The powers and duties allocated to the various divisions in the current act now fall to the corporation as a whole."

Here's another part. This may not seem important, but it's in here for a reason. "The corporation's first stated object, in clause 5(1)(a) of the current act, is to provide leadership in the co-ordination, planning, financing and

development of an integrated" model. This has been done. It's the report called *The Big Move*. "This is amended"—this is what's happening—"to say that the corporation is also to provide leadership in the implementation of the transportation network. Another amendment to clause 5(1)(a) is the added requirement that the transportation network support a high quality of life, a sustainable environment and a strong, prosperous and competitive economy." On the last one, the "strong, prosperous and competitive economy"—I think they're failing on that one. It might be a bit too early to talk about it, but hey, on the rest, they're probably doing fairly good.

"The corporation's third stated object, in the unproclaimed clause 5(1)(c) of the current act, is to be responsible for the operation of the GO Transit system and the provision of other transit services"—this is the key. They're going to integrate GO with Metrolinx. I agree 100%. It should have been done from the beginning. In fact, if I look back to when they implemented this—and I believe Minister Bradley was there. I was the critic and I said to them, "The governance is all screwed up and there's no money." Now they've got the governance fixed. So how can we disagree with it? He probably listened to our critical comments; I would hope that he did, or the ministry people.

"This is enacted again, with changes; the corporation is now to be responsible for the operation of the regional transit system." My concern is the transit systems in the region, whether it's Peel—Hazel McCallion wants something to say. That's her system. Or York, Bill Fisch—that's their system. Viva's got a very good system. In fact, they've got federal money, municipal money, provincial money in it, and it's touted as one of the more progressive systems. I'm not qualified to comment, other than what I read.

And the same in Durham. They're working tirelessly to integrate their system within Durham. At one time, there was a different transit system in Ajax, in Pickering, in Whitby, in Oshawa. Clarington never really had one, nor did Brock, nor did Scugog or Uxbridge, but it was integrated to the extent that GO Transit played sort of a spinal role, if you will. Now they're trying to work in coordination of schedules and stuff like that so they have one transit instead of four or five, and there's been some bloodletting over those integrations within the regions.

But they're going to take over the whole thing and they have no representation on the board? I don't know about this. The only way they're going to be able to get their attention is to wave the cheque in front of them. If they wave that cheque, they'll start saying, "Yeah, we go along with you. Give me the cheque." They'll be chasing Minister Bradley down the street for the money, and I have no doubt that he will have them chase him.

But here's the other thing, the system and prescribed passenger transportation systems in the regional transportation area. It says right here, "to make regulations prescribing passenger transportation systems, whether proposed or existing, for the purpose of this definition, and also specifying that all the assets of a prescribed sys-

tem be owned by the corporation"—whoa. We're talking about Durham transit buses or York Viva going to be named Metrolinx? That's symbolic. But if those assets then become—they've just expropriated all those assets from those regional transit systems.

The big problem with transit, as I tried to point out earlier, isn't so much the capital; it's the operating. That's the problem. I'm serious. Transit is a big money-sucker for operating. If you operate a bus seven days a week, 24 hours a day, it takes five people.

0940

We saw on the \$100,000 list that there are a lot of people in the TTC making \$100,000. I don't have my clippings, but I'm sure one of my supportive members in the caucus will give me them. I could pull them out and read them, but I left them with my staff, I guess. All I'm saying is there were about 200 or 300 people who make that kind of money in the transit system. Do you have your clippings, Julia? You don't? You should get them.

I am not trying to be hard on them. It's just very prohibitive when you don't have the density or ridership to provide transit. It sounds good, it feels good, but it isn't good. Do you understand? Toronto, you should have it more of it; that's good. London, Hamilton, Toronto, portions of eastern GTA and the western—Halton—there's an area similar to Durham in terms of density. Ottawa should have good transit. Centres that have population should have good transit systems, and that takes money.

This whole idea of who is going to own the assets and the liabilities becomes important. It becomes very important implementing this to have a smart card. Whatever the name of that card, there has to be a card to do the administrative background transferring of money to support the operating systems. That's critical, and I am supportive of that being the first agenda item that they move forward with, saying, "Adam Giambrone, step aside. Here is the card we're using." They have experts. I met with them, and as I said, the SIM card solution or other solutions are absolutely critical.

I'm going to add one more. This is my second observation for an amendment. I had a private member's bill. The idea was given to me by people from my riding of Durham. I met these people on the GO train, and they said, "Oh, you're John O'Toole. You take the GO train?" I said, "Yeah, I'm no different than you. I'm going to work today, every day, like you, and I take the train when necessary." They got talking a second or third time. Pretty soon it became almost a regular event, and they would ask, "Where were you yesterday?"

Anyway, they said to me one day, "Do you know what it costs?" It was a husband and wife, a nice young couple, too. They said to me, "It costs us about \$10,000 a year to take transit." I said, "That's unbelievable." They said, "Well, it's \$100 a week." I started to figure it out. It's \$100 a week; that's significant coin. Two of them, there's 52 weeks; we'll give them a couple of weeks off. That's \$5,000 each. It's more than \$5,000. I just started thinking about it. Think of this pressure: \$5,000 each? That's

\$10,000. You've got to make \$20,000 in your pay to put that much in your pocket with taxes, because 50% of what you earn is taxed.

So I introduced a bill that would give you a tax credit for expenses for the purpose of public transit. I throw this on the table today to Minister Bradley: Put a little sugar in the café latte here. Put a little sweetener in it. If you want to move riders onto transit—and you know something? TTC now gives you a refundable tax credit when you use a TTC pass, a weekly or monthly pass. I believe when they implement this card, Mr. Bradley—and I'll be the first one to shake your hand and pat you on the back if I'm here, because this would get riders out of the cars. Imagine \$5,000 a year from people coming from Hamilton or Halton or Peel or Durham, and all these young families that have student debt and all this stuff. As an idea that I'm putting out, give them a transit tax credit now.

I introduced the bill, but it isn't my idea. Our job is primarily to listen to people. Now, I submitted this. I gave that bill to every province in the country, and I gave it to the federal government too, because they have a ministry. It was Lawrence Cannon who was the Minister of Transport at the time, and I gave it to him. I was at an event where Lawrence Cannon was. I knew he was there. I like lobbying even though it's not part of my job. I gave him the bill and said, "Look, why don't you just run with this federally?" They did. The federal government implemented the bill. That is a true story. It'll be written in Hansard tomorrow, and you can take it to the bank.

I'm asking the minister to use the idea. Look, none of us have the corner on good ideas, not the Conservatives—we have most of them, but not all of them—nor the Liberals. We all have good ideas, the people here. Even Howard Hampton had good ideas, I think. When he was the leader, I was always impressed. And I would say even Floyd Laughren; he was a great guy. But on this bill that we're talking about—there's so little time to talk on such a large report. This bill here and the money part of it is very important, and that smart card and the functions of the funding, the operating budget, are very critical. I'm hoping that the minister goes through with it.

Now, Mr. Klees did say that we would very probably be supporting the bill. I'm putting in a proviso that I need to have a briefing, which I'm getting this afternoon or this morning on the bill. It's too bad I didn't have it before I spoke on it; there would have been a little bit more content in the debate this morning. But what I am going to do is bring up a couple of the ideas there, because I did listen yesterday when they had the member from Brampton-Springdale. She's here this morning. She spoke. She's the parliamentary assistant, and I'm sure that she has listened—in fact, I noticed her writing down some of the ideas I was putting on the table here. The member from London-Fanshawe and the member for Eglinton-Lawrence, Mr. Colle, spoke yesterday as well, so I do listen to their comments.

But there's one other thing I want to put on the table here that's a little troubling. I am not a lawyer, so I'm not

qualified to interpret it and to understand—the bill we're talking about, when it refers to another piece of legislation, a statute that it's amending, you really can't understand from reading this bill until you look at the current bill it's amending. That's a long way of saying it. This one here is the portion dealing with the development charges.

Now, the development charges are, indirectly, a tax on a house. They're a one-time tax. The development charges, I think, are about \$300 or \$400 per household for transit in Durham. That development charge is a levy—we used to call them lot levees, but they're called development charges now—developed to fund capital, primarily. They can't fund operating but they can fund capital. I'm not sure if there's anything in this bill—it says here, "Clause 42(2)(c) of the act is repealed and the following substituted:

"(c) prescribing a date for the purpose of clause 30.1(2)(b);

"(d) prescribing a date after which no amount is payable in respect of GO Transit under a development charge bylaw referred to in section 30.1, and may prescribe different dates for different municipalities;

"(e) resolving conflicts between the provisions of a transportation planning policy statement issued by the minister and other provincial plans and policies, including determining which provisions of a transportation planning policy statement or other provincial plan or policy prevail." And it says something here about the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area Transit Implementation Act, 2009.

They used to pool funding from the GTA for transit, and I think that has been resolved; they don't pool it anymore, which would then allow them to subsidize Toronto's TTC. The TTC could be subsidized, because some of the people like me, coming in from Durham or York or Hamilton or whatever, get on the TTC, and the TTC is being used by people outside the region, so that's how the money is transferred. I'm interested in that part of how the development charges are going to be changed, how the money's going to flow.

Having non-elected people on the board with this much power to spend \$50 billion, I would hope the minister has some way of an exit strategy—although they're his people. They will be appointed by him and they'll only be doing what he wants, I would hope.

The other thing is that these meetings—it's my understanding today that the meetings of Metrolinx are open meetings. It's very important for stakeholders—transit, urban planners etc.—to stay up to date on what is going on. But under this Bill 163, there's a suggestion that they are going to be closed meetings. How are these regional transit authorities ever going to learn about the goings-on in Metrolinx and where these new routes or plans are? I'd like to see this changed. I am not big on this closed meeting.

0950

Here's the issue: When Greg Sorbara announced the York-Spadina extension to the university, that had been

talked about for some time by Lorna Marsden, who was the president. It had been talked about back then; she's not the president anymore. That land would go up in value like that. As soon as you have transit, the condos and commercial properties around the transit, especially where there's going to be a station, would go through the roof. So some of this stuff with property and the implications with that should be in private; I understand that. But the timing and circumstance should certainly be in the open.

I am putting on the record number 3. To the member from Brampton-Springdale: There should be another amendment here mandating that the meetings be open. That would be the third kind of amendment that I think should be brought forward.

Governance: no problem. I'd like a provision where the minister can directly report to the Legislature when he's going to make major expenditures, like \$5 billion a year—wait a minute here. Rural Ontario is part of Ontario and there's no money from the provincial government for rural transit. Transit in rural Ontario is called roads and bridges, not buses. I want a level playing field here. I really do. The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke says that 50 times a year, almost to the point where you wish he would stop talking, but the issue here—

Mr. John Yakabuski: So when are you going to stop talking?

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, whatever. But I think that what we're trying to say here on our side is that this—Metrolinx, the \$50 billion—is all good stuff for density and trying to accommodate new Canadians, young people, universities and all these things, but rural Ontario, which is the forestry, the mining, the pulp and paper, the hard work, the wealth generators of this province, doesn't have transit. They want roads and bridges that are safe. We're putting that on the table too. Let's not ignore the way Ontario was built as a strong, terrific, prosperous province. Not everybody wants to live in a condo in Toronto. I don't. That's why I commute every day. It's a beautiful city if you like the opera, but I would sooner cut the grass.

I refer to this report several times, and I think members here should get a copy of it. Stay tuned, because this is the playbook; this is the background for Bill 163. The bill itself is not that big and it's fairly technical. There are a lot of references to the Corporations Act, the Development Charges Act and the Municipal Act.

One of the other concerns I raised very early on: I'm concerned because they signed a memorandum of understanding, sort of like a United Nations accord thing, with all the municipalities in Ontario—with AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and ROMA, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association. They signed a memorandum. What was that? That they would consult with them. I'm not sure that a lot of consulting went on. This came as a big surprise.

Now I'm—"suspicious" is too strong a word; "surprised" is a much more accommodating word—surprised

at the rush. I'm very concerned about the rush part of it, because if they're going to take over these municipal and regional transit systems by a new name, when all the taxpayers in those communities of Bowmanville or Oshawa or—not Mississauga; it should be called Hazelville—I would be very surprised if they expropriate it by the bill. I do not know that's happening, but there are things in here that lead me to believe that they're going to say, "You either co-operate with us when we wave the cheque or you don't get the cheque." This is going to do that, and they'll get the transit system working. They'll start chasing the Minister of Transportation. Whenever he does an announcement, they'll be there with their hands out.

There is a lot in this bill and, as I said, I probably spoke longer than necessary, but that won't be the first time I did that. I would only say that when you have Hazel McCallion approving it, it's probably been vetted. The consultation probably occurred at a very high level with people that they could trust. Robert Pritchard is an intelligent man and a former president of my alma mater, the University of Toronto. I would say that Rob MacIsaac—I've met with him several times—is a very, very capable guy. I'm fortunate to have known him; he's that capable. He's a former mayor and a very highly regarded fellow. Peter Smith, as well, with GO Transit, is very capable. He's run an operation that is the best in Canada in terms of how much revenue they get from the fare box.

I think the consultations—they came to a decision that they had to move forward, and that's an appropriate name for the report: The Big Move. So in Bill 163 I am proposing number 5 amendment. It should be called the Big Move. Let's get on with it. Bill 163 is called An Act to amend the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority Act. This morning, let's just rename it to the Big Move, because they're going to be taking a lot of money: \$50 billion. It's a scary amount of money.

Here we are in the middle of a recession. We're implementing a whole new tax; it's called the harmonized tax. That tax actually takes 8% out of everybody's pocket. That's basically what it does. You can start with the exceptions, the houses under—it takes 8% out of your pocket when you die. The funeral, the headstone, the pallbearers, all these various things you pay for—8%. You pay your bills, you get gas for your car, put heat in your home.

I'm wondering, if when you buy a transit pass it's going to have this HST on it. "Oh no, they've just increased the price of transit. I never even thought of that. I'm going to have to start"—that's terrible. Transit has just gone up 8% as of this morning, or when this bill passes. It's disgusting, really, when you think of it. At a time when the economy is going one way, their spending is going the other way. It's simple economics. It doesn't work. It's called a deficit and they're into an operating—what I call a structural deficit now. This bill and how good it is—and it's a reasonably good plan done by MacIsaac and Smith and all those people. We have no money. Why don't we have any money? We have poor tax

policy. Everybody is running away. And it's not just Premier McGuinty's fault, either. I want to be on the record clearly here today that he's trying his best, but he should have saved a little bit for the rainy day. They have had huge—they have increased spending by some 60%.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's because you asked us every day to do it.

Mr. John O'Toole: I know, but it's the unwise choices you make. This isn't a time—and the minister is right. Wise choices—they are telling us that \$50 billion is in this bill. That's a wise choice? I put it to the people of Ontario: Let's put it on a ballot. Let's find out if \$50 billion is a good idea.

I think helping seniors and people in long-term care who built this country—that's my first vote. Let's not put them in the poorhouse. Let's make sure that people with special needs—we have Community Living here today—are taken care of.

These grand, wonderful plans—and I see them in London and I see them in Paris and I see them in other countries. We can learn from their mistakes. They've got this huge infrastructure to support, and this is what this amounts to. Once you build it, you've got the ongoing cost of it all. It's not one-time. The operating budget on that kind of system would become the largest single expenditure in the province. It would cost more to operate a transit system than all the hospitals. That's a fact. Remember, for every bus that runs seven days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year—or maybe take Christmas and New Year's off—it takes at least five people. Each of those people should be paid and trained appropriately, with uniforms that get cleaned and all that stuff. They should probably make \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year. That, times five, is \$3 million per bus per year. How many people on that, how much per day?

I put to you that this strategy needs a fuller hearing. It's fine for the experts here, these urban planners, the Christaller central place people, telling us what to do. Of course, they like transit; that's their livelihood. That's where they make all their money and their training and knowledge etc. But I think there are other ideas in transit. I think light rail is more important than subway. I also think that smaller footprints in transit are important. Why have these big 60-some passenger buses in areas where there aren't 60 people living in this small community? They should have smaller buses.

1000

Why not give people who commute with more than one person in the car a tax break? Why not? Say you live in Uxbridge and you want to get down to Bay Street and you could prove, demonstrate—audited—that you are carpooling. I think they should be getting support, rather than a great big bus running around with nobody in it. So there are some ideas from the people whom I hear from in my riding, and I'm sure other members do as well, which could easily solve some, but not all, of this problem.

Bigger footprints like Toronto, Hamilton, London, Ottawa—big cities, big buses; small cities, small buses. I

put to you, in my town—in fact, I've said it to the mayor—we have about 80,000 people in my community. It's very spread out. It's quite large. It's called Clarington. It's made up of many smaller communities within the municipal area called Clarington. For the amount of people using the buses, they could actually give them a series of taxi chits. You could get the taxi chits for—let's say it would be \$10 for four tickets. Those would allow you a trip within the town's borders. Subsidize it municipally, rather than having a bus with nobody in it driving up and down the street with the carbon diesel going out the windows.

I'm telling you, there are other solutions here—and this bill isn't all of them. But the structure of the bill and its intent—it's well intended.

I've certainly rambled on here a while, but I hope it's been informative and that I did advance five specific ideas. I would hope that the minister, who has been here—that's a compliment. Often, they're so busy making phone calls and putting fires out that they're not allowed to come to the House. The parliamentary assistant was here too, and I know that she was listening and I think she took notes.

I'll look to see the Presto card brought into force. If they delivered that one thing, I'd be supporting the bill. I'd be there for the photo op—not in it, but taking the picture. I think that's what they need to do: Get the smart cards working—currently, the one they're looking at is called the Presto card—so they can deal with the administrative of transferring the money between Durham, Halton and all these places.

With the very little time I've been allowed to speak this morning, I would hope that the minister realizes that this is one bill we can celebrate, because most of the ideas here we've been supportive of, or at least we've advanced them. Again, I'm going back to first principles.

Frank Klees—I'm going to finish up that way—when he was the minister, started a lot of good things; he really did. Minister Bradley actually made them law in many cases, and here's another case where he's doing roughly the same thing. I think this bill here, as Mr. Klees said in his remarks, is the right thing to do.

I just don't want Durham to be ignored in this. Durham region and GO Transit should stay on the south side of the 401. People who want to come from Peterborough, Millbrook, the city of Kawartha Lakes—

Hon. James J. Bradley: That's not what Jim Flaherty says.

Mr. John O'Toole: Jim Flaherty doesn't know what he's—on this issue, I'm right.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, no, just this issue. I don't want to get into trouble here. But his wife is a person who I have a lot of time—Mrs. Elliott is a person whom I have the highest regard for, and I'll listen to her opinion on this because I know she uses transit as well.

Thank you for your attention this morning, and I'll leave a few minutes on the clock here.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's always interesting to listen to my good friend from Durham because he does raise good points in debate, I must say. Sometimes he digresses a bit, and I guess there was a bit of that this morning, but that's all in fun.

I just want to respond to a couple of points that he made.

We agree that there needs to be a better coordination of commuter services across the GTA. I think the point that the member makes is a good one: that this might be a first step toward a solution of trying to better coordinate services in the GTA. But we can't lose sight that there are many cities and towns and areas across Ontario that really do need special attention when it comes to coordinating their transportation services. If you're in eastern Ontario or northern Ontario or southwestern Ontario, it's much the same issue. Up where I come from in Timmins-James Bay, there's only really the city of Timmins that has a transit system. The member made a good point: A lot of these municipalities are struggling, trying to pay for transit services so they can help their citizens get off the roads and out of their cars and into transit, but it's pretty hard to do when you don't have the type of support we used to have from the provincial and federal governments. More and more, municipalities are having to go on their own.

The other issue is the coordination of transportation services beyond just the GTA. Again, where I come from, transportation is mainly cars and highways because there isn't transit in many places. So we need to look at how we can move people out of cars and how we can move freight off of cars and onto trains and other means of transportation. We own the Ontario Northland Railway, and it has always been an issue of contention in northern Ontario that the province is not using the ONR facilities as effectively as it could. Later on in debate, I'd like to be able to speak to that to a greater degree, because we really need to have a provincial integrated transportation strategy, not just one for the GTA.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It's a pleasure to comment on the remarks of our colleague from Durham, who is actually my neighbour. My riding abuts his at the Whitchurch-Stouffville-Uxbridge border.

I am obviously very much in support of Bill 163. This legislation is going to mean that things will happen faster; implementation will occur more rapidly than it has. This is incredibly important to the residents of my riding.

Minister Bradley came to my riding to open the Lincolnville GO station last summer—a tremendous asset not only to the residents of Whitchurch-Stouffville but also those from Mr. O'Toole's riding who come over from Uxbridge. It has made a dramatic difference to the Stouffville station. Now, with the Lincolnville station, people can park more easily and get on the train. The people right in the heart of old Stouffville appreciate the fact that their parking lot is not so congested. So these are great steps forward.

Our colleague made, I think, a very important remark in relation to those regional chairs, those political representatives from the municipalities who have served so excellently on the GO board and in their own transit systems, and what they've done. In particular, I would like to commend regional chair Bill Fisch, who really was the architect in York region of our amalgamated transit system, the YRT, which brought together the various local municipalities' transit systems. He did that in the face of some opposition. He showed great political leadership on that. He served many years on the GO board, providing his strategic expertise. Now this bill is the next step and moves us towards implementation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to offer a couple of comments in response to the member from Durham. I think that in his remarks he was able to identify some of the really difficult issues that we face in this whole issue of transit in the GTA.

Certainly the effort to be made with regard to a smart card is one that I think everyone will applaud. It needs to be something that is seamless, that allows people to move freely on public transit throughout the GTA.

The question of the level of commuter service is a real conundrum, because certainly in parts of my riding the object is to see if there's anyone on the bus besides the driver. The other complaint that I hear from those who do use it is that the routes, by virtue of this issue of the population, have to wind around areas. You can sit on the bus for such a long time and only have gone a very short distance simply because of these lengthy, circuitous routes. Then, naturally, people in my area who face these kinds of problems look at the kind of investment that's required and ask me to justify it.

So I think that as the government moves forward, as we move forward with some of the issues, this has to be kept in mind, that we need to provide a public service, a public transit service. Certainly, I think that there is agreement all around about the need to get people out of their cars.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I just want to say a few things about my colleague's very lengthy dissertation on this bill and on many other things which he found the opportunity to include in his conversation and discussion of the bill. First of all, I want to say to him that during his speech he actually said that once in a while I have a good idea, and I just want to caution him to be careful. I don't want him to go overboard and say anything here that he might later regret.

The reality is that I think my colleague has captured the essence of what is going on here. This has been a McGuinty government that has had lots to say about transit. In fact, it's the McGuinty government that has given a number of self-congratulatory speeches about transit, that has used all the right rhetoric about transit, that has made announcement after announcement about

public transit, but people are still waiting to see when anything is going to happen.

Sad to say, if you actually look at this bill, this bill still doesn't do anything. It is another shuffling of the cards in the deck. In this case, I would argue that the major thing that's happening with this bill is that public representatives are being shuffled off and private, corporate representatives are being shuffled on. What will come out of that? People will have to wait and see. But I think my colleague from the Conservative Party in part has effectively captured what is not happening under this government—lots of talk and no action about public transit.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Durham, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to thank the members from Timmins—James Bay, Oak Ridges—Markham, and Stouffville, as well as the member from Kenora—Rainy River.

I guess there were really five points to summarize briefly: One is the memorandum of understanding, the consultation process prior to the bill, the requirement to have open meetings to the public as well on any large expenditures; tax credits for transit users; the development charges implications for property owners and affordable housing; the smart card implementation, which is important to proceed with right away; and to always recall that Ontario is not just one big city. How about rural Ontario? The transit system there is roads and bridges.

But if I bring it back to my riding—the regional chairman, Roger Anderson, said, in response to The Big Move report, that the region of Durham isn't well served in the plan. In fact, the only thing they got in a 25-year plan, a \$50-billion plan, was a bus rapid transit system on Highway 2.

I don't disagree with the importance of moving forward, as I said, with these five recommendations. I think the bill is a framework to get on with making transit in urban areas much more friendly.

The comments made by the member from Timmins—James Bay were probably the best remarks when he realized that Timmins, in far northern Ontario, is emblematic of a community where they probably have fewer resources, and therefore probably less waste, so we should look at small-town Ontario as a good model of how to do public things in a way that's more efficient.

To the members who participate in this, we are setting the framework for a very broad policy into the future. I wanted to thank the board members who did serve on Metrolinx. Almost all of them were municipal mayors or councillors. I would also like to thank Paul Bedford, who is an academic with Ryerson University; Fred Eisenberger from Hamilton; Norm Kelly—he's a planner and councillor; Hazel McCallion; Adam Giambrone; Bill Fisch; Peter Smith; and Rob MacIsaac for the work they've done on this report.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 8, this House is in recess until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Bruce Crozier: It's a pleasure for me this morning to introduce three people who are in the east members' gallery, they being my friend Craig Demers, who is with Community Living Essex County—you'll get to know him better later today; Mathew Berthiaume, who works with Community Living Essex County; and Nancy Wallace-Gero, executive director of Community Living Essex County.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I would like to introduce Monica and Colin Costello. They are actually from the riding of my neighbour in Richmond Hill. They won their attendance today through a silent auction fundraiser.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's my pleasure today to introduce to the House Steven Muir, who is a member of my constituency staff and also a self-advocate with Community Living, and Dianne Garrels-Munro, president of Community Living Ontario.

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's a delight for me to introduce, in the members' east gallery, Chris Grayson and members of Community Living Peterborough.

Mr. John O'Toole: I would like to recognize all the people from Community Living Durham today, as well as Gary Cooke, who's a good friend of mine. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery Mr. Jesse Flis, former federal Member of Parliament for the riding of Parkdale—High Park. Please join me in welcoming him today.

We also have with us in the Speaker's gallery a parliamentary delegation from the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, led by Madame Truong Thi Mai. Please join me in welcoming our guests to the Legislature today. Welcome.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: To the Premier: Welcome to April Fool's Day. Sadly, this is also a dark day in the history of our province, a day that Ontario officially becomes a have-not province—have-not status for the first time in our proud history, thanks to the mismanagement, out-of-control spending and lack of priorities by the Premier and the folks around him.

Less than 24 hours ago, we found out that under your direction, taxpayers are on the hook for the bloating salaries of high-priced staff. The \$100,000 sunshine list has grown by more than 10,000 since last year alone, to well over 53,000. You couldn't fit them into a stadium. Premier, how do you suggest we tell our friends and neighbours who have lost their jobs and are struggling to pay their bills and your taxes that their taxes are going toward paying more than 53,000 public service workers over \$100,000 a year?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I welcome the question. First, I want to say that one of the questions that I've

been asked is that we index the original \$100,000 to inflation. Had we done that, 70% of the people on the list would not, in fact, be there. The reason that I've said no to that is because we believe—but, more importantly, families believe—that \$100,000 is a lot of money.

We also believe in transparency, and that's why we have, notwithstanding the approach brought by the previous Conservative government, through the sunshine law now uncovered OPG and Hydro One salaries to make sure that those are public. We're proud of the work that our public servants do for us, but we also feel a heavy responsibility to ensure that they are paid in keeping with the ability of Ontario taxpayers to pay them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The Premier can dress this up all he wants, but it's clear that he's not the one in charge over there. While over 300,000 Ontarians have lost their jobs under your misguided direction, you've allowed the salaries and bonuses at the lottery corporation to nearly double since you took office. The Ombudsman said that the OLG violated the trust of Ontarians and is out of control. This is an agency that has spent the past three years apologizing for blatant abuse of Ontarians' good faith.

Premier, why don't you take some control, show real leadership and roll back these salaries and bonuses and apologize to the people of Ontario for this agency's lack of respect for hard-working Ontarians?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We've got to keep an eye, obviously, on all these salaries and do what we can to manage costs.

I want to tell you a little bit about the Ontario public service, those folks who work directly for us. We have the fewest civil servants per capita of any province in Canada. We are the second-most efficient public service in the country. Ontarians are paying 32% less than the average pay for public servants, so to speak, across the country.

With respect to the sunshine list, the average salary of Ontario public service members on the list increased by just 1%. Those are the people over which we have immediate control, people working within the Ontario public service. We will do everything we can to respect the ability of Ontarians to pay and to ensure that we're being accountable to our families.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I've said it before and I'll say it again: The Premier is living in a very comfortable, taxpayer-subsidized bubble. It's clear he can't appreciate the impact his policies are having on real people in this province. You've driven this province into have-not status. You've lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs—100,000 in just the past two months.

Premier, do you have any idea of the message you are sending to struggling Ontarians when you sit idly by and let a discredited agency in the midst of the worst recession in 70 years hand out bonuses to fat-cat officials? Premier, show us you do understand, roll back those bonuses and fire the CEO.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: You know, the leader of the official opposition keeps disparaging his own province by saying that somehow we lack the capacity to generate the necessary wealth. I want to remind him of a couple of things.

First of all, Ontarians don't believe him. They understand that the recession we find ourselves in is global in nature. I think they also are on to the notion that we send tens of billions of dollars on an annual basis to Ottawa for distribution in the rest of the country. The fact is that we continue to generate a great deal of wealth in the province of Ontario. We have an ongoing conversation with the federal government; we'd like to keep a bit more of that so that we could use it to make ourselves stronger.

My colleague has a point when he says we need to continue to be prudent and responsible when it comes to protecting taxpayers' dollars.

TAXATION

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Back to the Premier: The Premier abused the trust of taxpayers in two consecutive elections when he promised not to raise taxes along with a mountain of other broken promises. It's to the point where his broken-promise policies and out-of-control addiction to taxing and spending have brought us to this very sad day in history where Ontario is now in have-not status and taking federal handouts. Let me remind you of the massive health tax grab, the biggest tax increase in our history. Let me remind you of the Premier's latest tax grab on Ontario's hard-working families through his last budget.

Premier, how much more abuse of taxpayer trust have you in mind?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think it's a good opportunity to remind ourselves of what the Conservative government did in its day. I will remind you that what they did they did during a period of economic growth. They cut health care by \$557 million in their first two years, when the economy was growing. They cut over \$1 billion out of education in their first two years, when the economy was growing. At a time of economic growth, they cut social assistance support by 22%. Then they froze that for eight years. They did the same thing to the minimum wage: They froze that for eight years. They did all those things at a time of strong economic growth.

I will gladly compare and contrast, in terms of our commitment to our public services and our vulnerable, against their approach any day of the week.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: We have a great deal of respect for the voters of the province and we know whom they can trust, and it sure ain't you.

I want to quote today's Toronto Star, when referring to the Premier's latest so-called harmonized tax scheme and the challenges faced by Liberal backbenchers: "...MPPs privately express disappointment at being 'misled'" by Mr. McGuinty. According to the same article, on March

10 you assured your backbenchers that “nothing had been decided” on this.

I’m not sure if your Minister of Finance is operating behind your back, but he actually signed the deal on the same day you were supposedly seeking input from your caucus.

Premier, you haven’t been straight with Ontarians, and now you’re not being straight with your own caucus. They are just simply trying to bring their concerns to your attention. Do you actually know what you’re doing? Premier, who’s in charge over there?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the leader of the official opposition’s genuine concern about my caucus and his longing to enhance relations. But one of the things that I would draw to his attention is an article—in fact, an editorial—that appeared in the Vancouver Sun, and I’ll quote from that. It says: “The case for BC to harmonize its sales tax with the GST has long been strong. Now it is even more compelling.”

Ontario is “an aggressive competitor. We can ill-afford to leave unchallenged this new, major tax advantage” that Ontario is creating for itself.

I would ask my colleague at some point in time to tell us whether or not, as a party, they intend to move ahead with a single sales tax in the province of Ontario, or whether, if given the opportunity, they would undo that and reinstall two separate sales taxes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Speaker, I’m not sure about you, but I certainly didn’t hear an apology to his caucus and all of the constituents they represent for blindsiding them and not giving them the facts in terms of what he’s doing in this massive tax grab. He kept his own caucus in the dark. He’s hurting constituents and the ability to represent their interests.

The Premier doesn’t seem—if that’s not the case, the Premier clearly doesn’t know what’s going on. We just have to look at his recent flip-flop on the minimum wage. And let’s not forget his lack of knowledge on the pesticide legislation. What about his comments a few months ago about it being crazy to raise taxes in the middle of a recession? What happened last week? A massive tax grab.

Now he has made it clear to his own caucus that there’s no need to attend those meetings; they are going to be ignored anyway. You’re going to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Listen, that was an interesting—

Interjection: Rant.

Interjection: Conversation.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Whatever. It was interesting.

Interjection: Exchange.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: An intervention, an assertion. We can get caught up in these kinds of things, but

what we’ve got to ask ourselves is, what do Ontarians want us to talk about? What do they want us to focus on?

There’s a tremendous economic challenge that we’re facing. Families have a great deal of anxiety. Communities, in some cases, have been devastated. People are losing jobs. I think they want us to keep our eye on the ball, and the ball is to find a way to move our province forward, not left and not right. I would respectfully submit that we’ve gone a long way towards doing that with our budget. We’re cutting taxes for businesses. We’re cutting taxes for people. We’re trying to build a more caring and competitive Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Spring is definitely in the air.

The leader of the third party.

JOB CREATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The budget missed a golden opportunity to use infrastructure dollars to create good, long-term jobs in this province. Yes, the government committed \$27 billion for infrastructure. But without a buy-Ontario policy, there’s no guarantee that Ontario is going to land the value-added transit and green energy jobs. Why did the Premier reject a strong buy-Ontario policy that would have created the long-term jobs in addition to short-term construction jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: First off, we appreciate the acknowledgment of the leader of the third party that in this budget there is a very substantial investment in infrastructure. I would caution her that there are opportunities, over the course of many months, to roll out programs in all communities in the province of Ontario that will be extraordinarily beneficial, not just from the standpoint of the shorter-term stimulative aspect of work for people, but in transitioning and transforming our economy to one that’s more productive.

The focus on transit, as an example, is very substantially important in the greater Toronto area, where we know that gridlock is something that imposes costs on business and makes us less efficient. So I do quarrel with the assumptions of the honourable member, and in the supplementary, I’ll look forward to opportunities to demonstrate just how many of these dollars are going to land here, to the benefit of the people of province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Twenty-seven billion dollars out the door, and the government will only have short-term jobs to show for it. With a 50% transit requirement for vehicle manufacturing and a 60% requirement for energy manufacturing, the light rail, the wind farms and the solar projects of the future could actually be made right here in Ontario, with steel from Hamilton and Sault

Ste. Marie and manufacturing expertise in places like Thunder Bay, Mississauga, Oshawa, Windsor and Niagara.

Why are the Premier and his minister rejecting proven policies that create good, long-term jobs and value-added jobs?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the contrary, nobody rejects the responsibility that we have in making the allocation of infrastructure dollars so that they should have maximum impact here in the province of Ontario. I think that we've demonstrated, as an example, on transit projects, that the all-in impact of those projects—over 80 cents of those dollars are spent and have impact here in the province of Ontario.

Yesterday, I toured a new gas-fired power plant being built in Halton Hills. The biggest value-added piece of that entire plant is from a Siemens factory that, if I'm right, is in the very member's riding, or at least in a riding of the honourable member's party.

These are examples of how our investments in the renewal and renaissance of our energy system, in the renewal of our communities, in our roads and in our transit will all have very substantial impact, on the short term through labour and through components, and on the longer term by transforming our economy to one that is more productive and able to meet the needs of the people of province of Ontario. And in green energy, we will demonstrate even more progress—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In terms of job stimulus, the McGuinty government is proposing a nudge when what we need is a jolt. Sometimes I think the Premier forgets, and this minister forgets, that we are talking about real people here. Sue, for example, has built light rail cars in Thunder Bay for 23 years, but without a government requirement that Ontario transit contracts create manufacturing jobs here, Sue has to worry about her future.

Why are the Premier and his minister so proud to support long-term value-added jobs in Germany, the US, China and Mexico, while Ontario's manufacturing sector is crumbling?

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Hon. George Smitherman: I do think it's very, very important to note that at the plant in Thunder Bay that the honourable member references, those workers were disheartened when the honourable member's party stood up and said, "No, we're not in favour of the expansion of subways in the greater Toronto area to the scarcely populated York region where only a million Ontarians live." Those workers know that the government of Ontario, through its investments in public transit, in subway cars and in double-level cars for GO Transit—the expansions in those areas, we know, have a positive impact in Thunder Bay. We have those workers first and foremost in our mind. We wonder why it is that the honourable member's party says that expansion of subway lines to York region is a wasteful exercise because that is a scarcely populated part of the province of Ontario.

We've said in the context of green energy—it's embedded right in the legislation—that we will establish domestic content rules which will enhance the investment here in the province of Ontario, enhance the economic impact for the people of the province of Ontario.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is back to the Premier. The budget is cutting more than \$2 billion in corporate income taxes. To benefit from corporate income taxes, however, companies need to be profitable. Can the Premier explain how across-the-board corporate tax cuts help hard-hit, money-losing companies that are shedding Ontario jobs by the tens of thousands every month?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to take the question just to ensure that my honourable colleague understands. While we're cutting business taxes by \$4.5 billion, we're cutting them for people by \$10.6 billion, just so we're clear.

We talked to Ontario businesses. They told us at the outset, a number of years ago, that the most important thing we should do, and what we are doing, is to eliminate capital taxes. I think my colleague knows that. We then asked what would be the next most important step that we ought to take together. They said, "You've got to find a way to move to a single sales tax." They said, were we to redesign our tax system all over again, we would not require our businesses to collect two different taxes, send them to two different governments and deal with two different sets of regulations and two different auditors. They said, "Give us one sales tax." That's what we're doing. That in and of itself will result in considerable savings, and when you get savings you grow stronger and you hire more Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Here's the Premier's economic strategy as I see it: Give already profitable companies more, and ignore struggling companies that are forced into laying off their employees and cutting hours, and then turn around and hammer Ontario families with an 8% tax hike. It's bad economics at the very time that it matters the most for the people of this province.

How can the Premier possibly tell Ontarians that giving more to highly profitable companies is the right thing to do, while ignoring those that are already laying off workers? How can he say that that is smart economic policy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The NDP, of course, is saying that this is heavily weighted in favour of business. Business is saying it's heavily weighted in favour of our most vulnerable. We're actually not about left or right; we're about moving forward on behalf of all Ontarians.

I want to remind my honourable colleague that she voted against, and her party voted against, a direct \$190-million rebate to manufacturers last year when we retroactively eliminated capital tax for them. Now she tells us that she's in favour of finding ways to move more quick-

ly on the capital tax front. We are moving on the capital tax front. We are reducing corporate income taxes. But we're also increasing the Ontario child benefit; we're increasing the minimum wage; we are investing in affordable housing; we're investing in health care, education, post-secondary education; and we're creating 300,000 jobs. It's a balanced, positive, progressive package that's suited to the values shared by Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Just last year, the Premier was telling the Conservatives that they were wrong when they wanted the government to cut taxes. He said in Hansard, "They want to cut taxes in the province of Ontario.... That is not going to help businesses that are struggling today." That's what you said a year ago.

Tax policy does matter. But there was another option that he could have chosen. A refundable manufacturing investment tax credit would have traded job-creating investments for tax savings. It would have benefited companies that are losing money. That's targeted tax policy, and it's proven. It has worked in Manitoba, and it has worked in Quebec. So instead of giving money to companies that don't need it while imposing an 8% tax on Ontario families, why did the Premier introduce a manufacturing tax credit?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Just to be clear, 93% of Ontarians will be getting a tax cut as a result of our package.

Again, we've already eliminated the capital tax for our manufacturers. It will be eliminated for everybody else next year. We're also moving towards a single sales tax and we're reducing corporate income taxes. We feel that it's absolutely essential as part of the package to putting Ontario on the road to recovery, but we will not lose sight of our most vulnerable. Again, we're increasing the Ontario child benefit from \$50 a month per child to \$92 per month per child. We continue to increase the minimum wage. We continue to invest in affordable housing. We're reducing income taxes on our lowest income-earners to the lowest level in Canada. From an objective perspective, you cannot help but conclude that this Liberal government is moving forward in—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Toby Barrett: My question is to the Minister of Finance. As of today, April Fool's Day, we all know that history has been made. It's official: Ontario is a have-not province. You can't just blame this on the decline of the rest of the industrialized world. All the other provinces within the Dominion of Canada have been subject to the same kinds of economic pressures.

Minister of Finance, my question is: How did it come to this? How did you manage to get the great province of Ontario into this pickle? Will you please explain?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Ontario will in fact be getting some of the money back now that it has put into the

federation—our own money. I would say that it's the result, as Mr. MacKinnon and others have said, of a gerrymandered equation that sees the vast majority of Canadians living in provinces that receive equalization. It doesn't reflect have or have-not status; it reflects the seriousness—and that's not us. There's a body of work done by a whole range of people that suggest that.

We've laid out a plan to move Ontario forward. We're investing some \$32 billion in infrastructure. I see that Mr. Hudak is opposed to that, and the Conservatives, I presume, are opposed to that. We are reducing personal taxes by \$10.6 billion and corporate taxes by more than \$4 billion, and we're investing in the kinds of human services that make this province, I believe, the best place in Canada to live.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: The best we hear is, "We're getting some money back." Minister, this is embarrassing on April Fool's Day. The Toronto Sun, for example, has a full front-page caricature of our Premier, tin cup in hand, Pinocchio nose down to the sidewalk. That's have-not status. This is not the Ontario I grew up in.

Minister, you talk about a plan. The only plan we have seen is seven years of projected red ink, seven years of deficits. Do you have a real plan to get us out of this predicament? Do you really care? Have you and your colleagues—essentially, we get the impression that you've given up. Perhaps you've panicked; you're taking the easy way out. Perhaps you see yourself as spending your way out of have-not status. What is the real plan, Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: There is a Sun newspaper I would like to remind the member of. The Vancouver Sun, on March 30—and let me read to the member what was in that editorial: "The case for BC to harmonize its sales tax with the GST has long been strong. Now it's even more compelling."

Ontario is "an aggressive competitor. We can ill afford to leave unchallenged this new major tax advantage it's creating for itself."

This is the best province in Canada, in spite of a gerrymandered equation on something called equalization. This is the province that will lead Canada out of these difficult times. People across Ontario have a plan from this government that invests in our future, both the immediate future and the long-term future, that will make this still the best place to live and do business in the country.

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MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre.

Ontario is reeling from skyrocketing job losses, with cities like Windsor reaching a heartwrenching unemployment rate of over 12%. These numbers cannot convey the devastation that is being felt by these workers. Mental health providers in the hardest-hit cities are reporting

alarming 22% increases in calls to distress centres and other supports, calls from men who have lost their jobs. Does the Premier have a plan to ensure mental health services are available to these laid-off workers when they need them the most?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, yes. As the member well knows, there are a number of fronts that we're acting upon.

I've set up my own advisory panel to initiate a mental health and addictions strategy for the province of Ontario. I know the member opposite is part of the select committee of this Legislature, of all members who are going to be working together, I hope, to help formulate part of that plan.

In addition to that, I know that in the budgetary policies outlined by my colleague the Minister of Finance, he has outlined some \$80 million to be available to provide funding toward mental health services and mental health providers, not simply in the city of Windsor but right across the province of Ontario. That's in addition to the hundreds of millions of dollars which are annually available to mental health providers. Mental health, having seen cuts in previous New Democrat and Conservative governments, is being supported like it never has before by this government—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, the Auditor General, in his latest report, found that the average wait time for community mental health services is 180 days. Six months is a very long time to wait when you're in distress.

Mental health research shows that massive job losses always lead to the same thing: increased depression, hardship, marriage break-ups and suicides. As predicted, the need for mental health services has dramatically increased since last fall, yet the new money has yet to turn into new services. What does the minister suggest to these laid-off workers who are in crisis right now and can't wait?

Hon. David Caplan: Of course I and all members of this House, when one person loses their job, want to be there to be able to support them, and we are, in a number of ways, whether that's through social services or mental health services or it's through retraining through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. I can tell you that since 2003, our government has increased funding by more than \$200 million. That's a 50% increase to mental health services.

But we do acknowledge there is more to be done. I do acknowledge that in the past, New Democrats—

Interjection.

Hon. David Caplan: I hear my friend from Trinity-Spadina tell us that in 1992-93, New Democrats cut \$23 million from mental health services in the province of Ontario. I recognize that those were the actions of a government at the time that I very much fundamentally disagree with. That's why we're working together with members on all sides of the House, and I would en-

courage the member to bring these ideas that she has forward to the select committee as we come forward and develop a mental health and addictions strategy for the province of Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

WASTE DIVERSION

Mr. Bob Delaney: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. There's a riddle in the information technology world that goes like this: How many computer programs does it take to change a light bulb? The answer is, "None, because it's a hardware problem."

Now, that riddle sums up Ontario's hardware problem as computer users upgrade to new equipment. Unwanted electronic equipment should not end up in landfills. These products also contain such toxic elements as cadmium or mercury, which can threaten water sources and land when disposed of improperly. Most parts in computer hardware—steel, glass, copper, aluminum, plastics and precious metals—can be recovered and reused to make new products. Some electronic equipment, such as computers, printers or televisions, can be cascaded, thus further reducing waste.

Minister, you launched a program to keep electronic waste out of our landfills. How will this program make it easier for Ontarians—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Let me first of all congratulate and compliment the member from Mississauga-Streetsville for his ongoing interest in the 3R program, which is extremely important. And he's correct: Yesterday we launched a new program which provides convenient options for people and businesses to reuse and recycle their used electronic equipment. It's all about keeping toxic components out of landfill sites and making sure that we recover the valuable metals and other materials for reuse in new products.

As of today, individuals can go on the dowhatyoucan.ca website, type in their postal code and find out exactly where they can drop off their old computers, monitors, printers and televisions. There are literally hundreds of locations around the province. They can take them to the Salvation Army. They can take them to municipal recycling depots, as well as selected outlets of Sears, Staples and Best Buy.

This is the right way to do it. We're keeping old computers, old electronic equipment out of the landfills.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Many of us, consumers and businesses alike, find ourselves at a loss when it comes to dealing with obsolete PCs. Old PCs and related equipment get piled up in store rooms and basements because people don't know how to properly dispose of them. Ontarians can now find convenient options to dispose of old PCs, TVs and fax machines and know that the materials will be properly recycled into new products and toxic components will be properly disposed of in an environmentally sound manner.

But obsolete PCs and related equipment are not the only products that need to be recycled. Products like digital cameras, cellphones and audio equipment also need to be diverted from our landfills for reuse or recycling. Are there plans to expand this program further to increase waste diversion?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I want the member to clearly understand that the old PCs we're talking about are the personal computers, and not the other PCs.

Waste Diversion Ontario and the Ontario Electronic Stewardship are working on a second phase right now that we hope to unveil in July. At that time, we hope to include in this program cameras, cellphones and other audio equipment. We also want to expand the number of collection sites. Right now we have over 167 drop-off locations. It's going to go up to 250 locations during the summer, and by year five of the program we hope to have at least 650 drop-off depots throughout the province.

We want to make sure that this old electronic equipment, the old PCs—the old personal computers—are kept out of the landfill sites so that they do not cause any damage to the environment.

CULTURAL FUNDING

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is to the Minister of Culture. Minister, Ontario is now a have-not province. You are running a huge deficit to pay for all of your programs. So why are you going to give \$5 million to build a new museum in Winnipeg, Manitoba?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: Our budget has reinforced all of the initiatives that this government is taking to reinforce, to reinvigorate an economy that needs the kind of leadership and the kind of courage that this Premier and this finance minister have shown in the budget. I'm very proud of that portion of the budget that falls within the realm of culture. I'm very proud of what this government is doing: understanding the role of culture in this creative, knowledge-based economy. Everything the government is doing is exactly right, exactly what we should be doing in facing these difficult times.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Well, instead of giving \$5 million in the middle of a recession to another province, why don't you give it to projects in Ontario? The Sharon Temple in my riding is looking for \$50,000 for renovations. Shouldn't you be providing money for Ontario's museums and heritage sites like the Sharon Temple, rather than money going outside the province?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I'm really disappointed at my honourable colleague's approach in this regard. This government has an incredible track record in reinforcing heritage sites, museums, art galleries, TV and film production, and a great understanding of exactly what we should be doing as a government who gets it on the culture file.

The Sharon Temple is an excellent and a fabulous location of not just Ontario historical happenings but Can-

adian happenings. It is, indeed, a file that I'm very cognizant of. I've met with the people involved, and I look forward to hearing about future developments in your riding and on that project.

Holistically speaking, one could not ask more from a government on culture and the creative economy than one could ask of this government. Our response has received nothing but kudos from every sector of this economy—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

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AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Housing. Toronto residents Angel Robinson and her two children, Tiera and Tyrone—very cute—are here in the gallery today. They are here because, like over 100,000 other Ontario families, they are waiting for an affordable housing unit. Angel and her family have been on the waiting list for affordable housing for 12 years. What would the minister who is responsible for ensuring that Ontarians have access to safe and affordable housing like to say to Angel?

Hon. Jim Watson: I'd like to welcome Angel to the Legislature, and I'd like to remind all members of the House what the honourable member said in this House yesterday when I proudly stood in my place and announced that the provincial and federal governments are going to contribute \$1.2 billion over the next two years to build and fix up affordable housing in the province of Ontario. What was the response from the honourable member? She said, "Crumbs is what this housing minister is giving them and hoping they'll be satisfied." Well, only a socialist would think \$1.2 billion is crumbs.

I'm very proud of the fact that we are working in partnership with the federal government, the municipal government and the not-for-profit sector to put a substantial, record amount of money into building new affordable housing so people like Angel can have a decent, safe place to live in the city of Toronto.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The minister well knows that not one dollar of that money is going to Angel Robinson and her family and people like them in the province of Ontario. To quote the Wellesley Institute, it offered virtually nothing to Angel or "the 125,000 households on affordable housing waiting lists and the tens of thousands of people who are homeless" now.

In fact, the budget for the Ministry of Housing was actually cut by 6% and has now fallen to 25% below where it was even three years ago.

When will the minister end the stress and suffering caused by the lack of affordable housing in Ontario, and put an end to Angel's and others' interminable wait for affordable housing? When are you going to help Angel? That's the question, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm very proud of the fact that this \$1.2-billion investment in housing will see \$704 million to repair and rehabilitate buildings to make them more energy efficient, \$365 million to create new affordable housing opportunities for low-income seniors and persons with disabilities, and an extension of the Canada-Ontario affordable housing program.

I would tell Angel, who perhaps is a constituent of the honourable member, that every single time we have brought forward new money to put into the housing budget, the NDP have voted against those particular measures. It's fine to stand up and talk and rant and rave about support for housing, but every time a vote comes in this place, that honourable member and her party vote against housing and the most vulnerable in this community. You should be ashamed of yourselves.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is also for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, the editorial pages of Ontario's newspapers make one thing clear: They want our government to tackle poverty. One way to tackle poverty is to invest in affordable housing, and indeed we've made progress in investments in affordable housing through programs such as the affordable housing program, which has meant over \$180 million for over 5,000 units in Toronto; the rent bank, which has meant the prevention of about 3,600 evictions in Toronto alone.

But Minister, I continue to read editorials stressing the urgency to tackle social housing that is in need of repair and the urgency for additional affordable housing. Last week's budget did make new commitments to affordable housing, but what in fact will these investments do? What is the detail here?

Hon. Jim Watson: I thank the honourable member very much for his question. I was very proud when, prior to the budget, I joined colleagues from the Ottawa area to visit 20 Rochester Street in the city of Ottawa, where we announced that, through the budget, Minister Duncan and Premier McGuinty—the province of Ontario—would in fact match the \$622 million in federal funding. That money is going to go to help some of the most vulnerable in our community by renovating 50,000 social housing units over the course of the next two years and building 4,500 new housing units.

Let me quote Hugh Lawson, president of the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association. After the budget, he said, "Today's announcement represents a bold move forward during these harsh economic times that will preserve and create more affordable housing, assist low-income people and create jobs. It"—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: Over and over again, I keep hearing the concerns about affordable housing's long-term challenges. Housing affordability problems are getting worse. Ontario's low- and moderate-income

households are losing ground. Communities are left to worry year after year about how much money our senior levels of government will commit to the cause.

Minister, as the former chair of the Toronto Community Housing Corp., I know that no social housing provider will ever turn down a one-time funding allocation when it's offered, but I also know that the real issue is, what steps will the province take to establish long-term goals and provide greater long-term stability to the important matter of affordable housing?

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm very proud of our track record when you look at the entire package of housing initiatives. One of the things I'm particularly proud of is the Residential Tenancies Act, where we brought some semblance of order to rent increases. Let me just tell the honourable member and some of the people in the gallery that rent increases under the Liberal government averaged 2.05% per year; under the Conservatives, 2.9%; and under those great pretenders of the vulnerable, the NDP, the average increase was 4.8%. I see the honourable member from Parkdale-High Park blushing, because she should be blushing. That is not a record I'd be particularly proud of.

We committed in the 2007 campaign that we would bring forward a long-term affordable housing strategy. I look forward to going out across the province with my parliamentary assistants, listening to people and learning how we can improve the housing situation in the province of Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a question for the Minister of Agriculture. The farmers of Ontario are concerned about Dalton McGuinty's tax grab, and they're as concerned as the Liberal backbenchers. Farmers fought for years for a point-of-sale exemption, so when they buy their farm equipment and supplies, they show their farm organization card and they don't pay tax. A farmer in my riding wrote me about the exemption and said, "Over the course of a year it amounts to quite a bit of money. I think the system works well the way it is and to change it will cause too many problems." Minister, can you guarantee that under the Dalton McGuinty harmonized tax grab farmers will continue to get point-of-sale exemptions?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I thank the member for the question. I certainly have received the same questions from farmers in my riding and I've heard from many of our rural colleagues in this assembly. We are, as we speak, confirming with the federal government how we will move forward on this very important issue. At the end of the day, what we are able to say is that farmers will pay no more tax in this area than they do now. We are very mindful of the issue that you've brought forward, as have our caucus colleagues. We are working with our federal government to mitigate the impact that moving to the harmonized tax will have on them.

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But what I can say as well, and I remind your constituents as well, is that moving to the harmonized tax, by reducing business taxes, is going to be good for farmers. They will be paying less—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

Supplementary?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Obviously the minister missed the previous questions when they talked about discussing it with the federal government. It seems the Minister of Finance was signing the agreement while you were thinking about going to talk to the federal government about it.

Minister, you once again demonstrate that you don't understand what is happening on farms across Ontario. Farmers used to have a rebate, and they fought long and hard to get the point-of-sale exemption because it works better for them. Now farmers will have to pay the tax and wait for months or maybe a year for the government to give them their own money back. Many will have to increase their borrowing to cover this money.

Minister, the budget allows for point-of-sale exemptions for some items. Have you asked your Minister of Finance to have agriculture included as a point-of-sale exemption?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: It is the Minister of Finance who is working hard on behalf of farmers and has. I would remind the member that it was this government that actually moved forward on the point-of-sale tax exemption. We have been very, very mindful of the issues of farmers.

I would also like to remind the member that with this shift, with this move, farmers will no longer be required to pay provincial sales taxes on their trucks and on the equipment they buy. If they purchase computers for traceability and improving their safety net systems on farms, they won't be paying tax on that. I have to say it's very important that all of the members in this House appreciate that this move is good news for farmers. There will be significant tax savings for farmers as a result of the leadership that has been taken by this government. Yes, you can go back and tell your farmers no taxes on vehicles or equipment or any computer equipment—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. Time and time again we've seen many examples of poor judgment and leadership at the WSIB. Recently, I've drawn attention to the WSIB's flawed experience rating system. It has now come to my attention, Premier, that the WSIB hired from outside of Ontario to fill the position of its chief prevention officer. At a time when Ontarians are struggling to find work, it seems logical that the WSIB should hire from a pool of talented and qualified Ontarians who are undoubtedly available to fill

a position like this one. Why does this government allow poor decisions by the WSIB to continue under its watch?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I must disagree wholeheartedly with my honourable colleague. I guess now as Canadians we can't help each other. We can't invest in a new national institution, a museum committed to human rights. We can't do that as proud Canadians. And now we can't hire anybody who hasn't grown up and lived in our province. That's not the kind of Ontario that I'm trying to build. It's not the kind of Ontario that I envision. I don't believe it's in keeping with the people of Ontario. We are proud Canadians and proud Ontarians at the same time, and we're not going to choose between the two.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: He just happens to be from Ireland.

Other examples of bad WSIB leadership include its failure to ensure that all employees are covered by the WSIB and its inability to insist that the Ministry of Labour enforce compliance with the certification requirements under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. The hiring of foreign key executives rather than hiring a qualified Ontarian is just one more example of poor judgment shown by the WSIB chair.

In the light of this newest development, maybe of bad judgment, will the government commit not to renewing the current chair's position in the WSIB for another term?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): You just asked the question. I would appreciate it if you'd listen to the response. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just think we have to be careful when it comes to pandering to protectionist tendencies, because economic history has demonstrated that there is no success to be found in pursuing that path.

I think the other thing that we've got to keep in mind is paying some attention to the foundation of this province. We are built on calling upon the best from around the world. Are we now going to say that we're closing our doors to others to come here to make a contribution to Ontario and to Canada? I think not. I just see it differently, and I'm pretty confident in saying that Ontarians see it differently as well.

ASSISTANCE TO THE DISABLED

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, tomorrow the ODSP Action Coalition is holding a two-day interactive forum right down the street from here. This conference is entitled "Leading the Way: Developing a Poverty Reduction Strategy for People with Disabilities."

I know there was a 2% increase in the budget, which was announced last week, for the people on Ontario Works and ODSP. It's important to support the vulnerable people among us. It's important since we are in government and you are the Minister of Community and Social Services. However, there are some, including the

ODSP Action Coalition, who are asking for more. They are suggesting that Ontario needs to see more action for people with disabilities. Minister, what is your response to this call for more action?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: That's a great question. In fact, as part of the poverty reduction strategy, my ministry is planning to conduct a social assistance review to identify any additional improvements to our program.

But that's only part of the story. We've already started to remove barriers that were keeping people from employment. For example, we simplified the rules around earning exemptions so that more people can work and they can keep more money; we're engaging employers' and employees' organizations to expand job opportunities for people with disabilities; we have extended drug, dental and vision care benefits to people leaving social assistance for employment; and we've launched a number of pilots to test innovative employment support that will help people on social assistance move to sustainable paid employment.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you, Minister, for your response. I know that the coalition, for the next two days, wants to talk on forming a proposal that would be submitted to you. Also, they want to continue the discussion with you and with your ministry in order to improve the lives of people who live on Ontario Works and Ontario disability.

It's important that we keep open channels of communications with these groups. We can work with them to improve the supports available to help the people reach their full potential. Can the minister tell me and tell this House how she is going to plan to work with those coalitions to improve their lives? Also, especially right now, when we have a strategy to reduce poverty in the province of Ontario, can you tell me, please, how we can include those people in your strategy to reduce poverty in this province?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I will refer the question to the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member. No one knows better about how the system works or how it doesn't work than people who are directly involved in it. We welcome the participation and advice from people like Community Living self-advocates, members of organizations such as Voices from the Street and the ODSP Action Coalition, as we move forward with our commitment to review social assistance. Indeed, our legislation specifically requires the engagement of low-income people in the development of future poverty reduction strategies.

The conversation has changed tremendously over the past little while around here. People who were, under the previous government, protesting on the front lawns of the Legislature are now at the table working with us, rolling up their sleeves and having a constructive—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

ASSISTANCE TO THE DISABLED

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, last year on Community Living Day you announced your government's plans to amend the developmental disability legislation by introducing Bill 77. The bill received third reading in fall 2008. Today, Minister, one year later, families are still waiting for Bill 77 to be proclaimed.

Minister, as you know, Bill 77 does nothing until proclamation. Will the minister announce today when we can expect Bill 77 to be proclaimed?

1130

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, I'd like to welcome people from Community Living here today. It's a great day.

That's a very good question. We are working with our partners in the community to put forward the act and to put action into the community. We want to get it right, so we are working with our partners. We want to make sure that there is one place that people can apply if they need housing or they need to go into a group home.

We need to formalize Bill 77. We are presently working, and I'm encouraged to see good improvement in the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Minister, we'd all like to welcome the members from Community Living Ontario, but I think we'd all like some answers too. What I asked you was: When can we see proclamation of Bill 77?

If your intent is to seek consultation and to reach out, then would the minister today table those prospective regulations so that we all have an opportunity to provide input and assess whether the regulations will actually achieve what we all agree is needed?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, you know, we celebrated yesterday the closure of our three institutions, so that was a great day for the DS sector. I wanted to commend all our partners in the community, including the families and those that we serve. It's a big celebration.

All of this started in our transformation of the DS sector. We are presently working with our partners to make sure that Bill 77 is working not only for the government but is working for those that we try to serve. The consultation is there. We're working with them. Our wonderful officials in the ministry are working on that.

I can guarantee you that that sector will improve and we'll reach our goal, which is full inclusion—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The question is for the Premier. Premier, in May 2006, you promised Ontarians that they would not be forced to pay for cost overruns from a new nuclear plant. You said, in a story that was reported in the

Globe, that if we were to go with nuclear, we would be looking at a turnkey operation. "Don't come to us with cost overruns. Been there. Done that."

Yesterday, an Infrastructure Ontario official was reported in the *Ottawa Citizen* as saying that cost overruns for a new nuclear reactor would be shared between the builder and Ontario Power Generation—in other words, the Ontario ratepayer.

Premier, that promise in 2006 not to saddle ratepayers with an overrun seems to have been abandoned. Why did you break that promise?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to say to the honourable member that what we've been working on in the context of the procurement of two new nuclear plants is to offer the greatest certainty and protection to the ratepayers of the province of Ontario.

We're in the process of evaluating bids that have come in from three prospective proponents for projects here in the province of Ontario. As we move forward and seek to come under contract to develop two nuclear plants, first and foremost will remain our desire and the obligation we have to protect the rate base from any implications such as the member has raised.

In the context of Darlington, as an example, people stopped the process of construction; that obviously proved to be a very, very untimely, unfortunate decision. We won't be replicating that in this process either.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The essential question is left unanswered. Premier, Ontarians are still paying debt charges on their hydro bills for nuclear reactors built more than 30 years ago. Renewable energy suppliers are not allowed to pass on their cost overruns to electricity consumers and taxpayers.

Once again, you're offering a special deal to the nuclear industry so that we get stuck with paying off the multi-billion dollar cost overruns that can be expected. Why are they getting a special deal?

Hon. George Smitherman: I think that the honourable member has this substantially wrong. You can see the process that we've initiated is putting substantial tension on the project proponents to take responsibility for those elements which are theirs in the construction of new nuclear plants. But in the circumstances, as an example, where Ontario Power Generation, as the developer, might make a mistake or an error that leads to the implication of cost, of course this is the responsibility of the proponents, as is the case with renewable energy. For those people who undertake the initiative, who are the proponents of such projects, there's some obligation for the outcome of such processes.

Through the Green Energy Act and the associated feed-in tariffs, we've established a very fair, reasonable price under a 20-year contract that is an incentive for those people to develop the projects, but we don't take responsibility if they make errors in the implementation of their very own project.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1136 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TAXATION

Mr. Toby Barrett: News of this government's 13% harmonized sales tax is spreading through Ontario like an April Fool's computer virus, sickening all who come in contact. Reactions have been swift and are intensifying with each passing day. I've received input from constituents who feel that Mr. McGuinty is insulting their intelligence with the harmonized sales tax rebate cheques. Some use very colourful language to describe Mr. McGuinty's spread of this harmonized tax-and-spend virus. Realtors, automakers, laid-off steelworkers, farmers, families, singles, taxpayers across Ontario—pretty much everyone—are calling, e-mailing, or writing to newspapers.

Let's talk about single folks for a moment. Singles drive to work, buy gas, buy groceries and newspapers, have their hair cut, and have home heating bills like everybody else. They pay the tax, yet they will get a mere \$300 rebate, as opposed to the \$1,000 for families. Why is this government penalizing singles? Why penalize some of Ontario's most vulnerable citizens; for example, seniors living on their own?

It's clear that this harmonized tax bait-and-switch is diverting attention from job losses and government paralysis. But the 13% harmonized sales tax has struck a sour note with the people of Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

PARLEMENT JEUNESSE FRANCOPHONE DE L'ONTARIO

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Aujourd'hui nous accueillons des étudiants des 41 écoles secondaires françaises provenant des quatre coins de la province de l'Ontario. Ces élèves, qui représentent l'école secondaire de leur région respective, participent au Parlement jeunesse francophone de l'Ontario qui se déroule ici même cette semaine.

Les trois objectifs de ce Parlement jeunesse sont de stimuler l'intérêt et l'engagement des élèves francophones envers la politique et le fonctionnement d'un gouvernement; de permettre aux élèves de débattre des idées, d'exprimer des opinions, et de défendre une position, tout en développant leur capacité de leadership; de favoriser la construction identitaire et ainsi susciter les élèves à s'impliquer dans leur communauté.

Le Parlement jeunesse francophone de l'Ontario est un programme unique en son genre car il engage les jeunes

dans les domaines de la politique, du journalisme et des organisations non-gouvernementales.

Je tiens à remercier le ministère de l'Éducation, la FESFO, ainsi que mes employés. Selon moi, ce Parlement jeunesse francophone est une des meilleures façons d'assurer la relève en politique. L'Ontario a besoin de jeunes énergiques qui souhaitent se dévouer pour leur communauté, et rien n'égalise la politique pour ce faire.

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: The McGuinty government's new tax on just about everything means ordinary Ontarians will pay more for meals under \$4, telephones, Internet connections, cellphones, and even funeral services. And that's just a start.

The Ontario Real Estate Association estimates that the new tax will add approximately \$2,000 to the cost of a real estate transaction. That's \$2,000 out of your pocket. That's the result of the PST being applied to legal fees, moving costs, mandatory home inspections, commissions, mortgage insurance premiums, title insurance—the list goes on. This tax grab will add over \$300 million a year to the cost of resale home transactions in Ontario alone.

Multiply this by dozens of other business sectors, and the real tax impact becomes much clearer. It's even larger than the health tax.

Interjection: No.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's surprising.

Multiply this by all the other inconveniences for businesses changing their systems.

I urge the government to rethink this new 13% tax before it does more harm, not just to the economy but to the Liberal government. We're worried that they made a bad decision, and now they have no way of getting out of it. I'm worried for the people of Ontario and, indeed, the economy of Ontario.

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mr. David Oraziatti: I rise in the House today to recognize that Sault College, in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie, will be training more apprentices with an additional \$550,000 provincial investment. This investment will expand the apprenticeship programs at Sault College and offer its students new, up-to-date training resources to help ensure that they are ready to meet the demands of local employers. This is just one more example of how our government recognizes that during this time of economic uncertainty, it is important for our workers to have the skills they need to take advantage of every local opportunity.

Hiring an apprentice also increases productivity. Skills are better developed because of the combination of formal education, mentoring and on-the-job experience. These improvements are part of our \$2-billion skills-to-jobs action plan, which gives Ontarians a competitive edge by training for tomorrow's high-skilled jobs in a

greener economy. As a government, we want our students to succeed, and with this approach and programs like these, students will focus on a career path that matches their skills and interests.

Sault College is one of many colleges in the province that provides a creative learning environment for students that better prepares them to pursue future opportunities. That means that apprentice students can stay in Ontario and gain the skills they need to have the future they want right here in Ontario. We are on track. We are putting students first and we will continue to support the training of skilled workers so we can continue to build a strong and vibrant economic future right here in the province of Ontario.

TAXATION

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to alert Ontarians to the subtlety of this government's attack on their pocketbook and on their businesses. There is a change in vocabulary that has taken place in this province. Typical of the McGuinty government, what they try to do is hide the facts of what is really happening with what they want people to think is happening. I refer to the term "harmonization," which sounds so very subtle and innocent, but what it really means is a tax increase. I refer to the term "stimulus." There was a time when deficits were something that governments shunned and tried to avoid. Now that we have renamed it a stimulus, it is acceptable.

I say that as the progressive Conservative Party we will stand on the side of consumers and on the side of businesses and expose this government's fiscal policy for what it is: an assault of taxation on families at a time when they can least afford it and an assault on businesses and the increasing costs of businesses to do business at a time when they can least afford it. Be they exposed.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I recently participated in the business mission to Vietnam. Our group also attended the Economist magazine second round table business conference in Hanoi. We met Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Sinh Hung, who delivered the conference's keynote speech about Vietnam's changing role in the global economy and its path to prosperity.

One could clearly see what can be done when weapons of war are turned into ploughshares. We saw tremendous economic growth and development. Living standards are rising, and generally the quality of life is improving. What truly amazed me, however, was the fact that every provincial Premier we met read from the same script: Encourage foreign investors with incentives, expand the market share of your products and educate and train your workforce.

How are we preparing our children to compete with the people willing to work harder, longer hours and just as smartly as we are? After my visit to Vietnam, I am convinced that our government is on the right track, that

our budget is forward-looking and that our Premier has the right vision. That is, keep building and expanding research infrastructure, support budding new companies and invest in post-secondary education and skills training. These steps are critical. This will develop the creative economy and will prepare our young people to compete in the international marketplace. Thank you.

1510

JACK BOUTHILLIER

M. Gilles Bisson: J'ai eu, tristement, l'occasion lundi dernier d'être aux funérailles de Jack Bouthillier, un soldat qui est entré dans les Forces canadiennes récemment, un jeune homme de Hearst qui pendant des années a toujours voulu devenir soldat des Forces canadiennes. Tristement, il est mort en Afghanistan. Il a été l'un des quatre soldats qui sont morts dernièrement.

Jack était une personne extraordinaire, un jeune homme qui a toujours vu comme but de devenir soldat dans les forces armées canadiennes, quelqu'un qui a pris ses responsabilités très, très au sérieux et qui a finalement eu l'occasion d'aller prendre sa place avec les autres soldats canadiens en Afghanistan.

Ce n'était pas à son tour. Il l'a fait volontairement. Il l'a décidé lui-même. Quand il y a eu un soldat de son régiment qui a fallu retourner au Canada, il a demandé, de sa propre volonté, d'aller en Afghanistan pour deux mois. Tristement, une fois arrivé, il a fait son entraînement de préparation, et la première mission qu'il a prise avec nos forces armées canadiennes, il est mort. Tristement, la première mission qu'il a prise pour les Forces canadiennes en Afghanistan l'a vu mort quand une explosion est arrivée sous son chariot. Il est mort avec trois autres soldats, dans des instances un peu différentes.

Donc, on prend cette occasion pour remercier la famille Bouthillier de nous avoir donné ce jeune homme, pour le sacrifice qu'il a fait qui est totalement inexplicable, et pour la famille et la communauté qui ont donné ce jeune homme à notre pays. Finalement, il a payé le sacrifice à la fin de la journée d'avoir perdu sa vie.

De la part de l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario, j'aimerais qu'on prenne une minute pour le remercier et pour rappeler le temps que M. Bouthillier a fait dans cette armée. Je demande une minute de silence, s'il vous plaît.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask all members and our guests to pause for a moment of reflection, a moment of silence.

The House observed a moment's silence.

PARKINSON'S DISEASE

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: J'ai le plaisir maintenant de parler sur ce sujet en deux capacités : comme médecin et aussi comme député de l'Assemblée provinciale.

Today marks the launch of Parkinson's Awareness Month in Ontario. As you all know, approximately

40,000 Ontarians are living with Parkinson's disease today. It's chronic, progressive and results in increasing disability that, unfortunately, dramatically impacts individuals, families, communities and, of course, the health care system across our province.

The Parkinson's Society of Canada works to educate parliamentarians and policymakers about the needs of Ontarians living with brain conditions like Parkinson's. The organization is committed to positioning the brain as a health priority and a social- and economic-related issue in Ontario to warrant significant increased policy attention.

As we launch Parkinson's Awareness Month, I'd like to encourage every member of the Legislature, and indeed the broader community, to think about their constituents, about their neighbours, friends and family members who may be living with Parkinson's. This insidious disease affects men and women of every age, and they're relying on our leadership and our stewardship of the public interest to help them live the highest-quality and most productive lives that we can offer them. Thank you.

MURRAY GAUNT

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: It is certainly with great sadness that I stand today to inform the House of a passing away of a truly remarkable man. Murray Gaunt was a man of humble beginnings who worked tirelessly to improve the lives of people in Huron-Bruce.

He was born in the middle of the Great Depression to farmers, and Murray started his childhood days by walking two miles to school. At a young age, he became a very keen observer of the technological transformation of agriculture. His enthusiasm for farming grew after the war, when things like the turkey broiler business and new animal husbandry techniques signalled that agriculture was changing.

After attending Guelph university, Murray became a poultry farmer and eventually a very popular CKNX farm editor. He was the voice of agriculture until one day he was courted to run in a provincial by-election for the Liberal Party. Murray spent 18 years as the MPP for Huron-Bruce, and he worked tirelessly to advance the agriculture issues of the riding.

In 2005, Murray Gaunt was inducted into the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame and recognized for his many achievements.

But what Murray was best known for was his unwavering grace and his kindness. He was also a proud father and grandfather. He is survived by his wife, Pat.

Join me in paying respect to this hard-working and compassionate man, Murray Gaunt.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask all members and our guests to please rise as we pay a moment of silence in memory of former member Murray Gaunt.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 63(c), the supplementary estimates 2008-09 of the Office of the Assembly before the Standing Committee on Estimates are deemed to be passed by the committee and are deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

Pursuant to standing order 62(c), the supplementary estimates of the Office of the Assembly not having been selected for consideration are deemed to be concurred in.

Report deemed received.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MOTOR VEHICLE DEALERS AMENDMENT ACT (DISCLOSURE OF LEMONS), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE COMMERCE DES VÉHICULES AUTOMOBILES (DIVULGATION DE RENSEIGNEMENTS CONCERNANT LES VÉHICULES DE PIÈTRE QUALITÉ)

Mr. Flynn moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 164, An Act to amend the Motor Vehicle Dealers Act, 2002 / Projet de loi 164, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2002 sur le commerce des véhicules automobiles.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: The intent of the bill is to protect Ontario consumers who may be interested in the purchase of a used vehicle. The bill amends the Motor Vehicle Dealers Act, 2002, and it requires that motor vehicle dealers disclose in writing whether a vehicle has been determined to be a lemon under the laws of any other jurisdiction.

1520

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT ACT (PROTECTION FOR ARTISTS), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI (PROTECTION DES ARTISTES)

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 165, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to artists / Projet de loi 165, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui a trait aux artistes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This bill extends employment protection to artists in the performing arts from a variety of disciplines and will enhance the lives of artists in this province.

COMMUNITY LIVING DAY JOURNÉE DE L'INTÉGRATION COMMUNAUTAIRE

Hon. Brad Duguid: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent that up to five minutes be allotted to each party to speak in celebration of Community Living Day's 10th anniversary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I rise today in honour of Community Living Day at the Ontario Legislature.

This year, we recognize a historic milestone for Community Living Ontario, for our government and for the people of Ontario. Sixty years ago, a devoted grandmother started Community Living to find an alternative to institutions. Today, the government has closed Ontario's last three institutions for good, and it has kept its promise to end the era of institutional living in Ontario.

Je m'adresse à la législature de la province de l'Ontario en l'honneur de la Journée Community Living, une journée mémorable pour l'histoire de l'Ontario et l'organisme Community Living Ontario, créé il y a plus de 60 ans par une grand-mère qui voulait trouver une alternative aux établissements résidentiels.

Aujourd'hui le gouvernement de l'Ontario ferme pour de bon les trois derniers établissements. Nous avons tenu notre promesse de mettre fin à cette période sombre où étaient institutionnalisées les personnes qui ont une déficience intellectuelle.

As we close the doors of the Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia, the Rideau Regional Centre in Smiths Falls and the Southwestern Regional Centre in Chatham-Kent, we close the doors to the segregation, seclusion and stereotyping of Ontarians with a developmental disability. Thanks in large part to the Community Living Ontario partners we honour today, we have opened the doors to a new era of community living.

For too long, people with developmental disabilities did not have a voice, so the people at Community Living Ontario lent them theirs. Throughout its history, Community Living Ontario has used its voice to build communities that are diverse and supportive of people with a developmental disability. For years, they partnered with us to end institutional living for people with a develop-

mental disability and today we come together to take that final step.

We have much to be proud of. In just five years, Ontario has met its commitment to end institutional living. In just five years, Ontario has passed new legislation and invested nearly half a billion dollars to increase wages, strengthen services and create more supports for people with a developmental disability in communities across the province. Our community partners and families have been working tirelessly to help us develop the regulations for this new legislation, Bill 77. I am very pleased to say that these proposed regulations will be made available online for public review next month.

These accomplishments are important, but what we are most proud of is every Ontarian who helped to make these achievements possible.

En moins de cinq ans, l'Ontario a tenu sa promesse de mettre fin à la vie en institution. En moins de cinq ans, l'Ontario a passé une nouvelle loi et a investi près d'un demi-milliard de dollars afin d'augmenter les salaires, renforcer les services et ainsi créer plus de soutien pour les Ontariennes et les Ontariens qui ont une déficience intellectuelle. Mais ce dont nous sommes tous surtout fiers, c'est le travail de toutes les personnes qui ont aidé à réaliser cet objectif. Certains d'entre eux sont avec nous aujourd'hui.

Many of these remarkable Ontarians grace our gallery today, and I would like to address them now.

To the members of Community Living Ontario: Thank you for having the courage of your convictions. You have become trusted partners, remarkable resources and dear friends.

To the advocates, families and friends, thank you for helping us to see people with a developmental disability through your eyes as a treasured daughter, a trusted neighbour, a respected co-worker or a cherished companion.

To the former staff of the Huronia, Rideau and south-western regional centres and the ministry staff involved in closing these institutions, thank you for your service. Your work continues in communities across Ontario today.

To the distinguished members across the floor, thank you for your partnership. You have represented the interests of people with a developmental disability in your communities faithfully. It is not every day that we pause to remember the contributions of all members in this Legislature, but I cannot think of an occasion more fitting. How appropriate that Ontarians with a developmental disability should be teaching us to look beyond political differences to our common strengths.

They have taught me much over the years. Craig Demers is here today. He taught me that success is a matter of focusing on your strengths, and he should know; he has more medals in more sports than most elite athletes. Thank you for coming today, Craig.

Applause.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Phyllis and Scott lived in rural institutions for much of their lives but are now

active members of their Toronto community. They taught me that a community thrives when people of all abilities participate. Thank you for being here, Phyllis and Scott.

Finally, there's Richard, Donovan, David and David. Their enthusiastic entourage of supporters and friends taught me that when we reach out to help one another, we help ourselves most of all. I thank them for welcoming me into their home yesterday.

En terminant, j'aimerais que nous gardions vivant le souvenir de ceux et celles que nous honorons aujourd'hui : ceux qui nous ont quittés comme ceux qui sont avec nous. Vous nous avez beaucoup appris, et nous vous en sommes très reconnaissants.

To all the people of Ontario with a developmental disability, both here and departed, we honour your legacy and celebrate your spirit. Our province is better because you have been in it. On this day, we prove that it is not just great minds that strengthen Ontario; it is great spirits too.

COMMUNITY LIVING DAY

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It is a great pleasure to rise today to speak on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party on the 10th anniversary of Community Living Day at Queen's Park. Community Living does fantastic work, not only in my riding of Dufferin-Caledon but in communities across Ontario.

Since I last spoke on Community Living Day, I have had the opportunity to meet and work with Community Living organizations from across the province and listen to their vision and challenges. It was very rewarding to work with them on Bill 77, the services for persons with developmental disabilities act.

The vision of Community Living organizations across the province is that people with developmental disabilities have the right to live in the community, to enjoy all that their community has to offer and to make a contribution to community life. This is a vision we all want to achieve.

This vision began many governments ago. Past ministers of Community and Social Services from all three political parties have had an important role in laying the groundwork for the closing of the final three institutions in Ontario. I would like to mention in particular the work of fellow Progressive Conservative and former Minister of Community and Social Services, the late Frank Drea. He is credited with improving the lives of those with a disability and working toward eliminating the institutional model. I was proud to see his vision recognized yesterday as the final institution was closed.

We are moving forward. The days of institutions are gone; inclusion is now the vision. No longer are the disabled removed from friends, family and community. Today they are integrated, not segregated; today there are more options. The differently abled are working in our communities, attending public schools and volunteering. We have come a long way from the days of institutions, but I would argue that we have not come far enough.

1530

Last year on Community Living Day, the Liberal government used this day as an opportunity to introduce and promote Bill 77, with their intent to create a long-term plan to provide developmental services for the people of Ontario. Almost a year has passed since that legislation was introduced. Even though Bill 77 passed last fall, it has not yet been proclaimed. Without proclamation, this bill cannot provide the long-term plan for the developmentally disabled that this government has said it wants.

We need to continue to build on the progress we have made. Organizations like Community Living have taken the time to provide recommendations for the implementation of Bill 77. I ask today that the minister table the regulations so that all stakeholders will have an opportunity to give their feedback. An open process will ensure that the changes we all want are achieved from the outset.

I would like to personally take this opportunity to thank Community Living organizations for their support of my private member's bill, Bill 94. I'm happy that the importance of Bill 94 was supported by all three parties and that the government has made the necessary changes to allow Ontario residents to set up registered disability savings plans without worrying that their ODSP payments would be clawed back.

During my time as critic for community and social services, I have had the opportunity to learn about the many volunteer organizations that dedicate themselves to serving the disabled here in Ontario. One such organization is Spirit of Life. Their mission is to support, enhance and contribute to the integration of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families to the broader community by providing public education, advocacy and coordinated services with partners within the Chinese community in the greater Toronto area. I had the opportunity to attend their celebration event this past weekend. I would like to congratulate the Spirit of Life on all they have been able to achieve in five very short years.

Today is a day to celebrate the many achievements of Community Living organizations across Ontario. Let us not forget, however, the needs of those families who care for their children in their own homes. They cannot be ignored. Many families are caring for their children into adulthood and should be given the same priority as other families. I've heard from many families over the past year who have applied for funding under the Passport program and have either been denied funding or put on lengthy waiting lists. Families are struggling, and we need to help them now. Community Living organizations across Ontario are dedicated to enabling people with disabilities to lead meaningful lives.

It is about building bridges, creating possibilities and independence. For that, I'm pleased to have had the opportunity to highlight their achievements and thank them for their continued support and advocacy.

COMMUNITY LIVING DAY

Mr. Michael Prue: It is a privilege and an honour to stand here today to speak to you about Community Living Day at Queen's Park. It is a privilege that so many of the people who are here today come from the 117 Community Living organizations across this province and are here to see how the Legislature works. New Democrats sincerely commend them for the important work, often unacknowledged, that they do each and every day, year in and year out.

I also want to take time to speak about the people that Community Living Ontario serves, our family and our friends with intellectual disabilities, so that they can have a meaningful life in the community that is rich and full. The goal of Community Living Ontario is, and I quote it in its entirety:

"That all persons live in a state of dignity, share in all elements of living in the community, and have the opportunity to participate effectively.

"Community Living Ontario envisions a society where people who have an intellectual disability belong and feel respected."

This, of course, is highly laudable. It is commendable. It is wonderful. And it is a goal that requires the co-operation, support and partnership of our government.

It was precisely this partnership that we were all hoping would be strengthened in last week's budget. We know that people with an intellectual disability face high rates of poverty for a variety of reasons, which include, but are not limited to, low participation in the workplace and workforce, unequal access to education, and inadequate supports and services. As we were waiting for this year's budget, delivered last Thursday, I was hoping for some real progress when it came to supports for people living with an intellectual disability. But instead, we were given a budget by the government that does virtually nothing for those with an intellectual disability.

Before last Thursday, a person who lives with a developmental disability got \$999 a month from this government. That was what they got to live on, and who in this society, who in this wonderful province of Ontario can live a full and meaningful life on \$999 a month? That is only slightly less than \$12,000 a year, and \$8,000 below the poverty line.

The government then turned around and said they were going to be very generous this year and, for the fifth year out of six, we are going to increase it 2%. That's another \$240 a year; that's \$240 so that they are not \$8,000 below the poverty line, they are only \$7,760 below the poverty line for a whole year. That 2% increase equates to almost nothing; you know, it's almost nothing. So now we have institutionalized what is going to happen to people with an intellectual disability. That's all the government has accomplished for those who were born with a disability or those who acquired that disability: a lifetime of poverty.

On top of these poverty level rates, this government continues to claw back on the benefits of those people

who are able to find employment, to punish those who have sought and found opportunities to participate in the workforce to contribute to the economy the way that is urgently required. I have said in this Legislature before, and I will say it again today, that it is one of the crying shames of this government that they claw back half of the money that people with an intellectual disability make. Because they get \$12,000 a year, when they go out and find a job—stocking store shelves, sweeping floors, working in restaurants, picking up tables, doing whatever they can in order to fully participate in our society—we take half of it back from them. I have asked this minister and this government on countless occasions, including today, why they continue to do that; why they feel it's necessary to do that; why, when they pass budgets and proudly proclaim they're reducing taxes for business by \$4.5 billion, they can't reduce the amount of money they claw back from those who are disabled.

These people find employment, they make a contribution to our community, and they are punished by this government through a claw back of half of their salary. Does this sound like good policy or supporting our community members with an intellectual disability?

We invested a fair amount of time in this Legislature last year on the topic of Bill 77. Bill 77 was about services for persons with developmental disabilities. As my colleague from the Conservative Party has said, nearly a whole year has gone by and it has not been proclaimed. A whole year has gone by and we've had a budget that did not put a single penny towards this laudable new goal that the government proudly proclaims at every opportunity. But today, this bill has resulted in the kind of inadequate and inaccessible services that were promised but have never been delivered. Even in its final draft, it still has not improved the working conditions of those in this field, nor has it brought wages on par with the rest of the sector—the kinds of supports so that those who do the important work that Community Living relies on can continue in a tenable way. For goodness' sake, this bill has not, even yet, passed royal assent, and I don't understand why this government has not pushed it. It remains stalled and there is no indication from the government about when we may see it pass. That's why this government's sense of commitment rings hollow to me and I'm sure to people in this room.

Today, the minister said it is not enough to belong but that everybody must be a full partner. I thought those words were brilliant; I only wish they were true. It cannot be true when the partner that we are trying to include has half of everything they earn clawed back. It cannot be true when they are deemed to always have to live in poverty, and it cannot be true when this government has seen, over the last six years, on five occasions to give them increases that are below the poverty line.

1540

I want this government to make the commitment. This is the last year I want to stand here and make a speech like this. Next year, I want to stand up and say to the minister, "You have done the right thing; you have ended

the clawback; you have allowed people to work and allowed them to keep the money; and you have kept the promises that this province has said." That's what I'm hoping to be able to say next year.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. I'd like very much to acknowledge the efforts of Eva Adams of Glen Erin Drive in Meadowvale in having played a part in collecting the signatures. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its ... capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Michele to carry it for me.

CHILD CARE

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance; and

"Whereas the removal of the temporary care assistance could mean that children will be forced into foster care; and

"Whereas the temporary care assistance amounted to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would receive to look after the same children if they were forced into foster care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse the decision" by

the minister "to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren."

I'm pleased to sign and support this because I think it is the right thing to do.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition signed by a number of constituents from the riding. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the people of the province of Ontario deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and their grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act, as above, to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks' table.

CEMETERIES

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to introduce this petition. I want to thank Eugene Oatley from the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada, Colonel John Butler (Niagara) Branch. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's cemeteries are an important part of our cultural heritage, and Ontario's inactive cemeteries are" consistently and "constantly at risk of closure and removal; and

"Ontario's cemeteries are an irreplaceable part of the province's cultural heritage;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government must pass Bill 149, the Inactive Cemeteries Protection Act, 2009, to prohibit the relocation of inactive cemeteries in the province of Ontario."

I'm pleased to sign this petition in support of it.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance; and

"Whereas the removal of the temporary care assistance could mean that children will be forced into foster care; and

"Whereas the temporary care assistance amounted to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would receive to look after the same children if they were forced into foster care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse the decision to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren."

I support this petition and am pleased to affix my name to it and give it to page Michael.

CEMETERIES

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from a number of constituents of the riding and especially those who belong to the United Empire Loyalists' society, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's cemeteries are an important part of our cultural heritage, and Ontario's inactive cemeteries are constantly at risk of closure and removal; and

"Ontario's cemeteries are an irreplaceable part of the province's cultural heritage;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government must pass Bill 149, the Inactive Cemeteries Protection Act, 2009, to prohibit the relocation of inactive cemeteries in the province of Ontario."

As I agree with this petition and it is my private member's bill, Bill 149, I shall sign this and send it to the clerks' table.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Honourable Leona Dombrowsky, has publicly stated that she 'absolutely' wants to help the beginning and new entrants to agriculture; and

"Whereas beginning and expanding farmers are going to be important in the coming decade, as a record number of producers are expected to leave the industry; and

"Whereas the safety net payments—i.e., Ontario cattle, hog and horticulture payments (OCHHP)—are based on historical averages, and many beginning and expanding farmers were not in business or just starting up in the period so named and thus do not have reflective historic allowable net sales; and

"Whereas beginning and expanding producers are likely at the greatest risk of being financially disadvantaged by poor market conditions and being forced to exit agriculture because there is not a satisfactory safety net program or payment that meets their needs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately adjust the safety net payments made via the OCHHP to include beginning and expanding farmers, and make a relief payment to the beginning and expanding farmers who have been missed or received seriously disproportionate payments, thereby preventing beginning farmers from exiting the agriculture sector."

I affix my signature as I agree with this petition.

LUPUS

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to introduce this petition, and want to thank the Lupus Foundation of Ontario, located in Ridgeway, which is in my riding, for providing me with this petition. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

I'm proud to sign my signature in support of this petition

1550

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of a number of people I have met with: Jack Logan, Laura O'Neill, Joanne Ritchie, Jim Park and Scott Mooney, to name a few. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the recently passed Bill 41 with regard to speed limiters on heavy trucks was passed without considering the effect on traffic flow, safety concerns and interstate trucking; and

"Whereas the speed of 105 kilometres per hour creates a dangerous situation on our 400-series highways with consideration to the average speed of traffic flow being 120 kilometres per hour;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislature suspend enforcement of the speed limiter law until the Legislature can review all studies conducted pertaining to the effect of this law on road safety; and

"That the Ontario speed limiter law be amended from 105 kilometres per hour to 120 kilometres per hour to remove the increased risk of collision on our highways and to prevent infringement on interstate trucking out of province"—and indeed affect the economy of Ontario.

I'm pleased to sign this on behalf of many truckers in the province of Ontario.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act, to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relationships between children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act, as above, to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerk's table with Victoria.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present yet another petition about the many concerns in my riding. This petition is in support of the Lakeridge Health Bowmanville site, and reads as follows:

"Whereas the municipality of Clarington passed resolution C-049-09 in support of Lakeridge Health Bowmanville; and

"Whereas area doctors, hospital staff and citizens have raised concerns that Bowmanville's hospital could turn into little more than a site to stabilize and transfer patients for treatment outside their home community; and

"Whereas the municipality of Clarington is a growing community of over 80,000" people; and

"Whereas we support the continuation of the Lakeridge Health Bowmanville site through access to on-site services, including emergency room, internal medicine and general surgery;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the McGuinty government take the necessary actions to fund our hospitals equally and fairly. Furthermore, we request that the clinical services plan"—CSP—"of the Central East LHIN"—local health integration network—"address the need for the Bowmanville hospital to continue to offer a complete range of services appropriate for the growing community of Clarington."

I'm pleased to support this on behalf of many constituents: Betty Pascoe, Elsie Roy and a number of others. I thank them for their support as well.

CEMETERIES

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from a number of members from the Ontario Historical Society, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

"Whereas Ontario's cemeteries are an important part of our cultural heritage, and Ontario's inactive cemeteries are constantly at risk of closure and removal; and

"Ontario's cemeteries are an irreplaceable part of the province's cultural heritage;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government must pass Bill 149, the Inactive Cemeteries Protection Act, 2009, to prohibit the relocation of inactive cemeteries in the province of Ontario."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks' table with Ahsan.

CHILD CARE

Mr. John O'Toole: Yet again another petition:

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance"—how sad; "and

"Whereas the removal of the temporary care assistance could mean that children will be forced into foster care; and

"Whereas the temporary care assistance amounted to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would receive to look after the same children if they were forced into foster care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse" this wrong-headed "decision to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren."

I'm pleased to sign this and support it in the interest of supporting the grandparents in Ontario—and the children, more importantly.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The time provided for petitions has expired.

OPPOSITION DAY

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I move the following opposition day motion:

Whereas, under the McGuinty government's watch, the province's total debt has grown by a whopping \$62 billion to \$173 billion; and

Whereas our total debt load has already escalated to \$13,515 for every man, woman and child in Ontario; and

Whereas the McGuinty government has increased government spending by an unmanageable 40%; and

Whereas, despite difficult economic times, the McGuinty Liberals intend to continue squandering Ontarians' hard-earned tax dollars by spending beyond their means with a deficit of at least \$18 billion over two years;

The Legislative Assembly calls upon the Premier and his government to publicly announce a detailed deficit reduction plan with specific measures and timelines to eliminate, in the very least, the McGuinty deficit of \$18 billion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Runciman has moved:

"Whereas, under the McGuinty government's watch, the province's total debt has grown by a whopping \$62 billion to \$173 billion; and

"Whereas our total debt load has already escalated to \$13,515 for every man, woman and child in Ontario; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government has increased government spending by an unmanageable 40%; and

"Whereas, despite difficult economic times, the McGuinty Liberals intend to continue squandering Ontarians' hard-earned tax dollars by spending beyond their means with a deficit of at least \$18 billion over two years;

"The Legislative Assembly calls upon the Premier and his government to publicly announce a detailed deficit reduction plan with specific measures and timelines to

eliminate, in the very least, the McGuinty deficit of \$18 billion."

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Before I get into the meat of my remarks, I should point out that we filed this motion, as required by the rules of the House, last Wednesday, and the budget was announced the very next day. We tried to see 24 hours into our financial future, but our crystal ball was obviously broken. We didn't see just how badly the McGuinty government had mismanaged people's money in this province. We severely underestimated the level of torment this government has wreaked on current Ontario taxpayers and on taxpayers yet to be born. In fact, because of the recent budget, we can now say that Premier McGuinty is responsible for increasing the province's total debt by an even more disgraceful and frankly alarming \$66 billion, bringing the total debt to \$201 billion.

What exactly does this mean to people talking about their futures around the breakfast table? It means that after the budget, every man, woman and child in this province is now on the hook for \$15,400, not the \$13,515 that I mentioned earlier, to clear. That is going to be required to clear our total debt. It means that the McGuinty Liberals are happy to literally pass the buck to future generations. It means they're happy to say, "Not my problem."

1600

The Liberal members across the way should be ashamed of the legacy they've been building for themselves. They will be remembered for the biggest tax hike in Ontario's history when they brought in the health tax. They will be remembered for the largest deficit in Ontario's history, a \$14.1-billion deficit that makes Bob Rae look like a Boy Scout. They will be remembered for surpassing their health tax grab of 2004 with an even bigger tax hike in this budget.

And now, they will be remembered for putting this once-proud province on the federal dole. Today is not just April Fool's Day; it's also Have-Not Day in Ontario. And it's no joke that today marks the first day that Ontario becomes a have-not province—not something to be put on the highlight reels.

Ontario, for the first time in its history, a past history of prosperity and job creation, will now accept a handout, courtesy of the rest of the country. It's a sad day for this province. What's even sadder is that Dalton McGuinty has agreed to accept these monthly welfare cheques from the federal government when it didn't have to come to this.

This leads me to the question: How did we get here? Well, the simple answer is, by spending without planning, throwing money at every problem without thinking it through—fast and furious spending, because spending, to Liberals, is like an incurable disease.

In fact, this government went from a \$6-billion surplus just last year to a \$14-billion deficit, just like that. But that's what every good Liberal will do: tax and spend, until they're red in face.

They'll tax the living, with a health tax of up to \$900; with new taxes from the recent budget on Tim Hortons

coffee, on audiobooks for the blind, on legal services, on Internet bills, on gas at the pumps, on restaurant meals—the list is endless.

Even the dead can't escape the Liberal taxman. You'll take a final Liberal tax hit on funeral services when you move to the beyond. That's the Liberal government's initiative to get you. As my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Mr. Yakabuski, pointed out to me earlier today, Dalton McGuinty already has his hands in the pockets of the last suit you'll ever wear.

We've got the Liberals' *modus operandi* all figured out. Their plan is to tax people on so many things that one particular item will never stand out. Every day we're learning of more goods and services that will be taxed when the Liberals move us to a single sales tax. Since 2003, the Liberals have terrorized people everywhere in this province with taxes, and there is no light at the end of the tax tunnel.

In the opposition day motion we're debating today, we are simply asking for a specific plan to get out of the deep, red pit the McGuinty Liberals have dug us all into. We're just saying, "Take responsibility for cleaning up your own mess." That shouldn't be too much to ask. Just telling us that Ontario will be back in the black by 2015, two elections away, is not enough, especially when we know, based on their past history, that the Liberals won't be able to cut their yearly program spending increases from 8% to less than 4% in the years ahead, as they claim they will do.

The McGuinty Liberals have let down the people of Ontario in the past, and they have proven time and again that they can't keep their word. There's an old saying: "My word is gold." For the Liberal members in this House, that's really: "My word is worthless," or at least, "My leader's word is worthless"—

Interjection: Fool's gold.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: —or, like my colleague said, "It's fool's gold" on the Liberal side of this assembly.

The Progressive Conservative caucus won't accept a plan written on the back of a menu, perhaps at one of the restaurants that will lose business because of the Premier's recent tax extravaganza. We're looking for details, for timelines, for specific action items. The taxpayers of Ontario deserve nothing less. After all, it's their money. They have a right to know exactly what the McGuinty Liberals are doing with it. They have a right to know if the Liberal government is worth betting on with the futures of their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

I say to the Liberals in this House: If you vote yes to this motion later this afternoon, we'll expect you to come forward with some specifics that are well beyond the deficit reduction fantasy that's in the budget right now. If you vote no to the motion, we'll also expect you to get cracking on a detailed plan that is realistic; that's doable. That's our job as Her Majesty's loyal opposition in this province: to hold the Premier and his ministers to account, to look over their shoulders, to make sure tax-

payers' dollars aren't being thrown into the wind. We will gladly continue to keep watch over this government and expose them for their tax-and-spend ways until election day, October 6, 2011, when the people of Ontario will speak for themselves. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? The member for—

Mr. Frank Klees: Newmarket–Aurora.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Newmarket–Aurora. I apologize, because I continue to have trouble with that.

Mr. Frank Klees: We'll keep working on that, Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise in support of the motion brought forward by the leader of the official opposition, which simply asks that this assembly call on the Premier and the government to announce publicly a detailed deficit reduction program that will eliminate the McGuinty deficit of \$18 billion, which we've been promised in the McGuinty budget.

There was a time, not only in this province but also in the federal government, when "deficit" was a bad word, when every government sought to eliminate and avoid a deficit. It seems that somehow we now have come to accept that deficits are inevitable. In fact, we've introduced a vocabulary now that allows us to talk about a deficit as a stimulus, and justify it as that, and somehow that's a positive thing. When we talk about increased taxes, this government has now come up with a way to redefine taxation, and is referring to it as "tax harmonization." But the truth of the matter is that this government is imposing the single largest tax hike on the people of Ontario in the province's history, through what they want to now refer to and implant into the minds of the electorate, the taxpayers, as "harmonization." They would have us believe that this, in fact, is good for the economy. The truth of the matter is that even the businesses, who are represented by the chambers of commerce, whose leadership has advocated for tax harmonization—the businesses that those chambers are representing are rising up and they're saying, "Upon consideration of the impact on our businesses, we want nothing to do with it, especially in these tough economic times when we're having difficulty keeping our doors open as businesses." Yet this government listens to none of that.

So it falls to us as the official opposition to raise awareness of what this government is doing, to raise awareness of the fact that it's an \$18-billion deficit—which is not the debt. What it means is that for every man, woman and child in this province, there is some \$15,000 of additional debt attached to them because of the mismanagement of this government, and we're expected to simply accept that, and accept that as a necessity.

What we're saying today by way of this motion is that having crafted a budget that hands us an \$18-billion deficit—which means, very simply, that this government feels compelled to spend \$18 billion more than it's taking in in revenue—at the very least what this government

does is present to this Legislature, to the people of Ontario, a plan that is transparent so that we and the people of Ontario can hold the government accountable for restoring this province to a balanced budget, so that we can stop the rush into red ink and we can stop the mortgaging of our future. That is a simple request. The people of this province will be watching how members of the government vote on this important issue, and if they vote against it they'll be voting against transparency, they'll be voting against accountability and they'll be supporting continuous mismanagement by their government. We rest our case.

1610

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I have had an opportunity over the last number of days to look at this much-unanticipated budget, this much-unanticipated set of programs put forward by Liberals in Ontario and Conservatives in Ottawa, that unholy alliance that has come up with things that I think have made taxpayers extremely angry.

It took a few days, but we've done our research and we've tried to come up with all of those things that heretofore were not taxed and are going to be taxed now. I just want the taxpayers of the province of Ontario to hear what I think is only a partial list, those that I've been able to uncover, of those things that used to be tax-free in Ontario and are now going to be taxed, so that every time after July 1 of next year when they go in and avail themselves of any of these goods or services or make these purchases, they're going to find that there's a further 8%. Just for the edification of those, this is what I've been able to find out.

Energy: Everything from gasoline and heating fuels, which used to be free, is now going to cost 8% more. So when you go out and fill up your gas tank it's going to cost you 8% more. When you fill up your home heating oil—if you still have oil—it's 8% more. If you heat by electricity, it's going to cost 8% more. If you heat by natural gas: 8% more.

If you go to a conference or seminar as part of your daily work, whether you work for the government or private enterprise, and you are required to go to a conference or seminar, those costs will go up 8%.

If you buy footwear that used to be exempt if the footwear was under \$30—mostly running shoes, I'm sure, but also some cheaper brands of shoes that cost \$30 or less—they are now going to cost 8% more.

Prepared foods: If you go to any of the many places in Ontario and buy a hamburger or buy a hot dog at the corner or get a slice of pizza, do whatever you do: 8% more.

New homes: You buy a new home—and of course there is a rebate and I'll acknowledge the rebate, but if you buy a new home it's 8% more. If that home costs up to \$500,000 there will be no rebate on that, but I have to say, for the people who live in the Toronto area, a \$500,000 home is not a mega home; it is pretty much average. The average home in Toronto today is selling

for slightly under \$400,000, so this is not some exorbitant home; it may be in some parts of the province, but certainly not where I come from.

If you smoke, tobacco will now cost 8% more. If you go and get a haircut, it will now cost 8% more. If you have professional services, if you have to go to a lawyer, an accountant or anyone else who provides professional services in the province of Ontario, it will cost 8% more. If you rent a commercial property, it will cost 8% more. I have to say that I despair for all those people who have set up their own private little companies, who have a storefront, who now see an additional 8% cost for the commercial property that they are renting.

Real estate commissions, if you buy or sell anything, any kind of property, will cost 8% more. A membership fee at the gym will cost 8% more.

A newspaper—and I have one delivered every day to my door at home. I pay for it myself, by the way. I know that's kind of a revolutionary thing, but I do so. That will cost me 8% more, as will the magazines. Even magazines like Maclean's that I buy on a weekly subscription so that I can see what's going on in an in-depth fashion around this country will cost me 8% more.

When I take a taxi, it will cost 8% more, or a limousine to the airport, if I am required to travel, will cost me 8% more. Admission to a live theatre will cost me 8% more, so even a night on the town will cost me more. Admissions under \$4 to any events, which used to be exempt, will cost 8% more. My Internet access fees will cost me 8% more. The landscaping around my house, if I didn't do it myself, would cost me 8% more. If I were a golfer, it would cost me 8% more for the green and golf fees in the province of Ontario. If I'm going to mail a letter, it would cost me 8% more for the stamps. If I am rich enough to send it by courier, if it has to get there a little faster, that too will cost me 8% more. Probably the kicker here, the one that bothered me the most, is, if you're trying to look after your health and you want to eat some vitamins, whether it be vitamin C, vitamin D or any of the whole plethora of vitamins and minerals that oftentimes doctors tell you you need to eat in order to be in the best of health, that too will cost 8% more. That's 8% more for everyday purchases. That's what the people of Ontario are going to see next July.

Last night, I had the opportunity of going on The Agenda with Steve Paikin. I was accompanied by a number of economists and futurists and people who were talking about this, but also I had my colleagues the Minister of Natural Resources and Mr. Tim Hudak, the member from—it used to be Erie-Lincoln; I can never remember now what it is. The three of us were on there along with three others. I was asked the question whether or not this was a good thing for the economy, and that's a difficult question. I know the Liberals stand up and talk all the time about it, saying it's good for the economy because it's good for business. I think the jury is out on that; I happen to think that it's not, but I know that there are some in this House that do. But I did state—and I think there's probably not a soul in this entire room who

would disagree with me—that it may or may not be good for the economy, depending on which side of the fence you're on on this, but it was terrible, absolutely abysmal politics. I know, and the Liberals opposite me know and people around this entire chamber know, that this has been and will be abysmal politics. That's why there has been a bit of a revolution and a bit of a revolt within the Liberal caucus. I read about it in today's Star, yesterday's Star. Other newspapers are starting to report that there are leaks coming out, that many of the backbenchers—in fact, even some of the cabinet ministers—are very unsure about whether this has been the correct political approach to take, because where this has been taken in the past in Canada, where it happened in Nova Scotia and in other provinces, inevitably what has happened is that the government has fallen in the next election. So if it's good economy, the jury is out. I happen to think it's not going to be good economy, but it's really bad politics.

I do know, from letters to the editor that are starting to come in across the province and from phone calls and e-mails that are coming to my office—and I know to all of your offices—the jury is already coming in. The jury is already telling you this was not the right thing to do, because ordinary people see that they are being charged more, and they see, beyond the one-year \$300 that the government is going to give to a single individual or the \$1,000 that they're going to give to a family, that this is not going to pay for this increase, this overall and continued increase on the things on which they expend money most regularly. They see that.

If someone were to buy, and this is not outside the realm of possibility—I certainly know, as a person who lives in the largest city in this province, that to buy 2,000 litres of gasoline a year is not untoward. It's probably what I buy. That is to take me around here; to take me on trips outside within the performance of my job; to visit my mother, who lives in Kingston, and my brother, who lives in Kingston; to visit family and friends; to go on vacation. It's not unusual for me to buy 2,000 litres of gasoline a year. That's really kind of small. That will take me—in my car, my 2001, Canadian-built GM product car—about 17,000 or 18,000 kilometres. That's pretty much the average of what people drive, and I know that if I buy 2,000 litres, so do most people—some more, some less—but 2,000 litres is not untoward. That 2,000 litres is going to cost them about \$150 in extra taxes. If you are a single person, half of everything you are going to expend and pay in extra taxes is going to be taken up by gasoline alone. What about the heating oil for your house? What about the electricity to put the lights on? What about your gym membership? What about restaurant bills? What about all the things that weren't taxed before?

1620

When this government says they're going to send out \$300 to a single person, and that's supposed to cover it, I have my doubts whether in fact that's going to be true. Yes, they may get a \$100 cheque three times. Sure, they might. Sure, they will. I don't doubt the government is

going to send them out. They're going to send them out at Christmas. They're going to send them out just before the next election. That's what they're going to do.

But the reality is that more money is going to be spent than that. The reality is that those three cheques that come in for \$100 might be a little bit of a bonus, but those expenditures that happen every single day, day in, day out—that 8% that's added to your hamburger, that 8% that's added to your newspaper, that 8% that's added to the lawyer fee or anything else you happen to do every day; that 8% that's added to your gasoline when you fill up two or three times a week—are going to be very bad politics. I don't understand why this government is doing it. I understand why this opposition is trying to stand up and rail against it.

I would agree with this opposition and I would agree with this opposition day motion, except what they are also saying at the same time is not only is this bad politics—which it is, and I agree with them—but they are also saying that this government should not be investing in the future. This is where I have a little bit of a problem in the reverse, because we know that countries across the world—we know the G20 is meeting this week. We know that finance ministers, prime ministers, premiers and presidents from across the world from some of the largest nations—Canada is sort of in the middle—and from some of the smaller ones as well—, are standing there and saying what has to be done in terms of the world economy. Almost all of them are talking about some form of stimulation.

This used to be a bad word. It used to be that somebody would say it is a bad thing to stimulate the economy, but I am telling you I don't believe that there is any option in the world today save and except to stimulate the economy. When I see what the government is trying to do to stimulate the economy, I cannot stand here and tell the government straight-faced that they ought not do it, because I think they have to do it. When I see what they are trying to do with the Detroit Three to protect one in six jobs in Ontario, I am saying we have no option save and except to try to do that.

I have to say that we need to play hardball, and I hope the government is prepared to play hardball. I am not willing to hand over money, as most Ontarians are not willing to hand over money, unless there are certain guarantees. The guarantees that I would seek are shares in the company, because I believe we have to have equity for the money that we are expending, but I also believe we need a seat on the board of directors. I know that might be heresy to some of the right wing. I also think that we need to protect the workers and the pension and everything else that goes there because, after all, we are going to be equity partners in that process.

But, having said that, we need to expend that money. Do we need to build railways and roads and sewers and all those other things in Ontario? Yes, we do; we've needed to build them for years and years. Is this an opportunity to build them? Yes, it is. It's an opportunity because Ontario is not alone. Ontario is one of 10

provinces, all of which are taking a similar tack. Ontario is not alone because the Canadian government is taking the same tack.

I never thought I would live to see the day when a Conservative government led by Mr. Harper and a finance minister like Mr. Flaherty would be out there pounding the drum for deficit spending, pounding the drum for spending money. This is really quite amazing.

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Prue: I know some of the people here are starting to hoot and holler, because it's true. It has amazed me. I didn't think I would ever see it, and it was really passing strange to me when I heard the finance minister the other day stand up and say he's fully on board with Mr. Flaherty and he hopes the Conservatives are too.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Yeah, but only on that issue.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, no—okay, only on that issue. But he stood up and he said that.

Hon. John Gerretsen: I know.

Mr. Michael Prue: I think it bothers the Minister of the Environment. I don't know. It doesn't bother me. Maybe it does, but only to the extent that I never thought I would hear it.

But they are both starting to sing from the same handbook, and therefore—

Hon. John Gerretsen: No, you know better than that.

Mr. Michael Prue: Hear me out. Therefore I find it a little passing strange that the opposition would now stand up and make a motion that says we ought not to be spending the money.

When the Prime Minister of Canada is over there in London before the G20 talking about the necessity of those expenditures, when he is talking about the whole world needing to do in part what Canada is doing, when he is talking about free trade—when he is talking about all the things I hear so often in this Legislature—I find it very passing strange that the members of the official opposition, who purport to be Conservatives in their own right, are trying to undercut that.

I have a difficulty with this motion, because what I think the Liberals are doing in terms of this budget is extremely bad politics. I think it is going to come back and hurt the Liberals in no uncertain terms, come the next election.

I think people are going to be as angry at this budget as they were with the Conservatives when Brian Mulroney introduced the GST. When Brian Mulroney did it, he said all the same things: This is good for the economy; it's good for business. These are the exact, same words I heard from his mouth, and I saw the once-mighty Progressive Conservative Party of Brian Mulroney reduced to two seats. I saw it never resurrected again. I watched it swallowed whole by the Alliance and become what the party is today. It's not the Progressive Conservative Party. It's a new one; it's a different one. What they once were is gone, and the GST killed them. I watched the same thing happen in Nova Scotia. Harmonization killed them.

I wonder why the Liberals are doing this. I have to look you in the eye. You wonder why you're doing this. All of you wonder why you are doing this. But you are and you're not going to back down, and I don't understand why.

I also have no understanding why the Conservatives are doing what they are. They are attacking the fundamental basis of what they have stood for all these many, many years, in terms of harmonization. They're talking about running a deficit. They're talking about expenditures on things that are going to help the people of this province and the people of this country and, hopefully, the people of the world, in terms of righting the economy.

I have a difficult time. I have to stand to speak to this. I will not be supporting the government's budget; I can't. I can't support this harmonization.

I know that people will stand up—the Premier will stand up; the Minister of Finance will stand up and say, “You voted against some little, tiny aspect of this budget.” He will do it interminably. He will do it at every single opportunity when there's a tiny, niggling little thing in there that he thinks will cause me grief.

I cannot vote for the major purport of this budget, which is harmonization. In the same way, I cannot vote for the major proposition that's being put here today.

I believe with all my heart that we in this room, in this chamber, have an obligation to do what is necessary to set the economy straight, to set it right. If that involves spending billions of dollars on infrastructure, then I am prepared to do it.

I know from my experience as a mayor, from my experience in municipal government, that the opportunity to build roads and sewers, libraries, daycare centres and community centres, and to put the community right was a good thing. It is still paying dividends 15 years after I left that office. It was the right thing to do.

I am suggesting that the government is right, in terms of the deficit spending. I cannot agree with the Conservatives. I think that the deficit spending—

Interjection: You're going to vote against the motion.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm going to have to vote against the motion. I don't support their budget, but when you frame a motion in two parts, attacking what is obviously wrong and then attacking what is obviously right, you don't leave me and the New Democratic Party any choice.

I'm not going to vote for it, but I want my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative Party to know that they are partly right: The whole GST combination, the harmonization, is a bad political move. It is not going to do what it is supposed to. But I would ask you to reconsider what you are saying about infrastructure, about the expenditure of money for libraries, roads, sewers, municipalities and all the things that are necessary to put people back to work. It is not just Ontario that is doing it. It is every province in Canada; it is Canada; it is all of the G20. Most of the leaders of the world are convinced that this is what is going to get us out of these doldrums, and I think you should get on board.

1630

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: It's always interesting to rise when we have our debates. It reminds me of that old political axiom: “Some of my friends are for and some of my friends are against it, and I stand with my friends.”

I am pleased to be able to enter into today's debate on the opposition day motion by Her Majesty's loyal opposition, as is appropriate. Let me say that the motion is interesting, and once we get by some of the hyperbole about “whopping” and “squandering,” you can get to the gist of the motion.

Let me just start by saying something that's not a surprise in here; we've heard it and we're going to hear it over an extended period of time, I expect, on a whole variety of fronts. This is a new economic order that the world is finding itself in. The old framing of economics, the old framing of tax structures, the old framing of jobs has changed worldwide, no less here than in other places in the world and in other places in this country.

It wasn't so many months ago that it was our government and our party under the leadership of the Premier with the fall economic statement that was the first one out of the gate, as it turns out, to let folks know that our government was faced with a situation that we were heading into a deficit year. At that point in time, his colleagues across the country, federally and provincially, as well as the finance minister's colleagues across the country, were all saying, “Oh, my goodness; not us. Not us in British Columbia, not us in the eastern part of the country, not us in central Canada, not us in western Canada and certainly not us federally. We're all having a balanced budget. We're not going to have a deficit. We're on track. Don't worry.” Lo and behold, not very many months after that, one after another they would begin to topple in the context of their projections of balanced budgets. Each of them saw their revenue streams decline to the point where they had no choice but to come forward and say to their public as well, “We're facing the same situation that Ontario is facing.”

The Premier was asked at the time of our fall economic statement by his colleague, and I was at the meeting where that occurred, “What are you going to stay to your constituents? How are they going to take this?” His comments were, “They're way ahead of us. They understand the economic situation we're in. They already get it.” I think that was quite readily borne out. I would suggest that our constituents here in the province of Ontario already understand the need for fundamental change, both in our tax structures and in our spending, to ensure that we can retain what we have and grow a new economy.

Back those few months ago our federal friends, if I can call them that, our buddy—

Mr. Michael Prue: Best buddies now.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Our colleagues in the context of elected office came into government with a large surplus. We came into government with a hidden deficit. Now

they are faced with a deficit financing situation and see the clear need for stimulus economic activity through infrastructure, principally. We clawed our way back to a balanced budget, and now we're faced with a similar situation: a need for some deficit financing for stimulus in the province of Ontario, as well as the restructuring of our tax structure here in the province of Ontario.

The proposals for change in the overall tax structure in the province of Ontario are going to result in about 93% of Ontarians having a reduction in their personal income tax. That's at the most basic level. We're going to take advantage of our negotiations with the federal government as part of our move to bring in a single sales tax—which ultimately will be better for the economy and better for Ontarians—to provide Ontario families and individuals with direct money as we implement the single sales tax so there's a very direct offset.

We're doing this for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is to protect the quality public service that we have spent years now rebuilding from what was left. We're doing it so that we can invest in Ontario, invest in the infrastructure in Ontario, invest in innovation in Ontario, invest in post-secondary education in Ontario, so that we'll be in a better place at the end of this recessionary period than we were going into it. We're going to transform the tax system in the province of Ontario to meet this new political order, this new structure we find ourselves in, not just locally but globally.

I have to question whether the official opposition, by virtue of their motions, want us to invest in Ontario. It would appear that they don't see the value of the investments in the infrastructure in this province, by virtue of the motion. It would appear that some of the key infrastructure investments that are being proposed are not something they support. Don't they have an interest in the \$700 million being proposed to rehabilitate some 50,000 social housing units in the province? Don't they have an interest in those individuals and families who occupy the social housing network we have to ensure that we enhance the quality of that housing for their quality of life? I guess they don't support the \$360 million to be invested over the next two years together with the federal government to create 4,500 new affordable housing units for those very same people, low-income earners, seniors and persons with disabilities. We have to make these investments if we're going to achieve these goals. If we don't make the investments, the goals can't be achieved.

I'm not sure that they support the \$175 million proposed over the next two years along with the federal government to extend the Canada-Ontario affordable housing program. Certainly housing is important in this province, and this is an excellent time for us to be able to make many of these investments.

We've been working with our municipal partners now since we came to office and during that time frame have made very substantial investments by transfers of funds to them, particularly when we were in a position do that by virtue of a surplus situation. Even now we plan to continue to do that, with some \$780 million proposed in

new funds in this budget for municipal projects, things like local transportation projects in our municipalities. Should we forgo the enhancement of our local transportation networks or should we take this necessary opportunity to invest in those, to create jobs in the province as well as enhance our local infrastructure?

We're going to be investing in new medical school spaces as well. I would think that all parties would be supportive of new medical school spaces here in the province of Ontario. We're all crying for doctors, but it's part of our overall budget strategy, and we need to have the resources to do that.

In this budget, the province is proposing substantive expenditures. We're doing what jurisdictions around the world are finding it necessary to do. We're doing what other provinces are going to be doing or what the federal government is doing. We're investing in infrastructure, we're investing in roads and sewer and water, we're investing in affordable housing and we're investing in transportation. We're doing that in this particular time through deficit financing.

At the same time, we're restructuring the tax system in the province to ensure that we are in a better place, as we move through this process, when we come out of it. We're doing that not so that the corporations can make bigger profits, not so that they can pay bigger dividends to their shareholders; we're doing it because that's our commitment to them. Our commitment to business is to make business more efficient, more effective and more competitive. But in return we expect them to create more jobs for our families, for our children, for Ontarians. That's the quid pro quo. To achieve that, we need to transform the tax structure, and our expectation is that they will return to us jobs for Ontarians. It will be our job to hold their feet to the fire as we make these changes, this transformational change in structure, as companies benefit by virtue of doing business through these changes, and that we work to ensure that there are new jobs for Ontarians in the short and in the long term.

I won't be supporting the opposition day motion. This is an absolutely necessary time for us to undertake the initiatives that are proposed in this budget, and I certainly look forward to the continuing debate on the budget itself.

1640

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'm here to speak in regard to our motion today. I'd like to start off by putting into context some of the factors why this motion is on the floor. I'd like to remind everybody that there is an old adage that hard-working people throughout Ontario know and understand, and it goes something like this: A penny saved is a penny earned. Clearly, the Premier doesn't know this adage, probably because he's never earned penny. But he certainly knows how to spend. Give him the public's credit card, and six years later we all need to go to credit counselling services.

Today we are here to debate a motion to stem long-term deficits and growing debt, crafted by the most

spendthrift government this province has ever seen. Today we have in front of us a \$14-billion deficit, the largest in the history of this province. But what are we getting for all these dollars? More government, more bureaucracy and more dollars out of the pockets and purses of everyday people.

The Premier certainly had some high-priced help to craft this budget, according to the sunshine list. So let's take a little look at this list. Ten staff in the Premier's office are on it; the Premier's own chief of staff, nearly a quarter of a million dollars—165% growth on this list since the Liberals took office—165%—and a 32% increase this year over last year. The sun now shines on more than 53,000 government employees. It's clear the Premier doesn't like the darkness. Soon enough, every public employee will be in the Premier's sunshine book.

Now let's shine a little light on the budget: the largest deficit in Ontario's history, a provincial debt that has doubled in just seven years, the single largest tax hike in Ontario's history, and spending that has skyrocketed past \$100 billion. But that's not all. During this time we have lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs, and expect to lose another 135,000 this year—the highest unemployment rate in 12 years. And the capper: We are now a have-not province.

This may be April Fool's Day, but the Premier isn't fooling anyone. Every time he turns around, we see his hand in another person's pocket. The only thing Dalton delivers on time and on record are higher taxes and broken promises. The Premier is singing a new tax song with this budget, a song of harmony. But it's not in tune with anybody I know. The Premier appears to be learning it's easier to speak out of both sides than sing out of both sides. With this new harmonized sales tax, we see yet another despicable tax grab and broken promise. In every other jurisdiction that has harmonization, the provincial tax rate fell. If this was an honest budget, the Premier would have done the same. Plus, no other province in Canada had to beg Ottawa for bribe money to sell their harmonization package. A \$1,000 bribe goes along with the Premier's new tune—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member, take your seat. There's a word there that you're using, and I think we would all prefer—it would be better in a parliamentary way—and you should be careful.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I will.

Instead of dropping the harmonized rate to 10%, making it revenue-neutral, he's opted to take \$2.5 billion more out of the pockets of Ontario's residents. While the tax bureaucracy grows and grows, today we're a have-not province, our economy has gone from first place to last place in Confederation, and we have a government that spends more, taxes more and regulates more. The Premier doesn't realize that when you're deep in a hole, you ought to stop digging. We can only return to prosperity when the Liberals stop digging this economic hole.

We're watching unemployment rise, taxes rise, the bureaucracy rise and salaries rise, but there is a silver lining in every cloudy Liberal budget. Unfortunately, it's

in Saskatchewan and New Brunswick. Those provinces are knocking on our doors. Today they're here in Toronto to lure our best and brightest at a job fair, bringing opportunity for the people of Ontario that this government has not. The McGuinty government has offered them all a one-way ticket with his \$1,000—I'll use a different word—incentive in this year's budget.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I've got to tell you, it's a pleasure to speak to this particular motion before us—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Is that a new shirt? It's very white.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You like the shirt? I'm glad you like the shirt.

I just want to tell my colleagues to the right of me that normally what I like to do is attack the government. I really do. As the former minister across from me, Minister Bradley, would often say when he sat here, "The enemy is there," and he's right. Generally speaking, that's what we should be doing, and I'm going to do a fair bit of that too, because it would be unfair if I didn't clobber them in the best way that I can and I lost an opportunity. I would never lose an opportunity to do that. So I'm going to help to do that.

But the Tories, they just drag me back in, right? They drag me back and force me to remember Mike Harris, and I really want to forget him; I really do. Most people want to forget him, and yet they bring his image back day in and day out. This motion does it for me, and it hurts me. It hurts me when I remember him, because what I remember about Mike Harris is that he took away \$14 billion from our provincial coffers by cutting income tax and by cutting corporate tax. That \$14 billion is gone, gone for good. We can't bring it back anymore, and the Liberals don't want to bring it back because they don't want to tax income anymore.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'll get back to you in a moment. But the problem—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Rosie, go after Harris.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I know. You see my hands, how they move, right? With one hand attacking the right and the other attacking the middle, and that's the way it is.

And so the Tories depleted our provincial coffers by \$14 billion over an eight-year period. Do you know what it means not to have \$14 billion in provincial coffers and what it could do to help Ontarians, especially in a time of need such as this one? Do you know what it could do? Because the Liberals will list all the things they're doing with less money. Oh, they've increased services and education and health for seniors, long-term care, all that, see? And they do it just like magic. There is no money. They're saying they are increasing by the billions, but there is no money. They took it all away. But they have to appear as if they're spending billions and billions and billions, and they're not. You're not doing that very well. You're not doing that.

You remember the Tories when they said, “We’re going to cut red tape”? They cut so much red tape that there is no more red tape left to be seen or to be had. What happened to all that red tape? Yet they leave government and they keep talking about red tape. They had eight and a half long years to cut that red tape, and they’re still talking about red tape.

1650

Interjection: They ran out of scissors.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: They ran out. They did the worst with red tape. There is none left. Yet to hear them, to hear the leadership candidates and others, you would think there’s still more to be had. I don’t get it.

They fired civil servants in any way possible, and they were proud. They did it with pride. They said, “Government offices are fat. We need to cut that fat.” And they did it with glee, with pleasure. They set about saying, “Goodbye, sayonara,” and they loved it. You could see the drool coming out of their mouths as they did it; they enjoyed it so much.

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: If the drool doesn’t please you, they were vampiric in their desire to get their jaws into those civil servants and eat their way through that civil service. They did their best, and they loved it.

But now they’re in opposition, and it’s as if they have never been in government—eight and a half long years. So they bring me back and say, “Oh, our total debt has gone up.” They left a \$5-billion deficit. How do you do that? How do fiscal conservatives, great managers that they are in a great economy leave you a \$5-billion deficit? How do Tories do that?

You have to be skilled to do it. You really have to have managerial skills to do it. You’ve got a whole lot of citizens and taxpayers watching this program who actually believe that these people are good managers of your money. They actually believe it. They actually believe that Harper is doing a better job and he’s one great fiscal manager.

Yet at the federal level what have they done? There’s a serious debt there, a serious deficit there. The deficit is going to be on the order of, what, \$57 billion in a year or so? Nobody talks about Harper and his deficit and/or his debt, because Tories are great fiscal managers. Oh, the argument might be that if the Liberals were there the debt would be \$100 billion, but with the Tories it’s only going to be \$57 billion. That’s great. That’s great management. We don’t attack Tories at that level.

You see, it upsets me when I have to deal with motions of this kind. I want to be friendly with the Tories every now and then, because we’ve got a common enemy over there, right? That’s generally the way it works, and I am like that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I’ll tell you one thing: You’re straining the relationship.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Of course I am, but I have to do that. You’ll recall just a short while ago that—

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Boys, I’ve got 10 more minutes. Relax. I’ve got a quote here by Bob Runciman. What’s the date here? March 25, 2009. He said, in respect to harmonizing the GST and the retail sales tax, “In theory, we’re supportive of harmonization.” I see. A short while ago, on November 26, 2008, John Tory, whom I respect, by the way—I know that most Conservative members are happy to see him go. I wasn’t; I liked him very much.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: David, I only have 10 minutes.

John Tory said that “government should consider moves like cutting corporate tax or harmonizing sales taxes to stimulate the economy.” Now, Tories might say, “Bob didn’t really mean it. It’s in theory, really, but he doesn’t really know what he’s talking about, possibly, and other Tories do. And, you know, that’s why we got rid of John Tory. He said foolish things like that, so we got rid of him.” They might say that—I don’t know—but it was their former leader who said we should be harmonizing, and Bob says that in theory—I don’t know what it means in practice—he supports it. Usually, if you support it in theory, you support it in practice, really, in my mind. But I could be wrong. I could really be wrong, and I await some of the Tory speakers who might correct me in this regard. But, you see, you and the Libs are like this—so tight are your arms locked in, arm-in-arm, that it’s hard to separate them—which is why I quoted Bob Runciman and which is why I quoted John Tory, because you are of like mind.

Let me tell you about what some Liberals said but just a short while ago on the issue of harmonization. The Honourable Dwight Duncan, in response to Tory questions, said: “If you think corporate tax cuts are going to solve the problem, you’re sadly mistaken”; emphatically he said that. I know you—because you said at that time, “I agree with him.” Now, some of your Liberal backbenchers have to say, “Now I’ve got to agree with him when he changes his mind. This is really tough.” I understand what you’re up against. And Duncan said, “We have very competitive tax rates, number one, in spite of what others ... say,” meaning what the Tories say. “Number two: We are cutting the capital tax, to the tune already of \$1.5 billion.” That was November 4, 2008—but a short while ago. It wasn’t that long ago, and you would think the memory would be fresh enough to be able to say, “Gee, I did say that. Now what do I do?” Could memory be that bleak and blackened that you can’t remember it? I don’t know.

What does the Premier say about this? Let me tell you: “Here’s the real issue,” he says, “and we need to expose this to the light of day: They want”—meaning them, the Tories—“to cut taxes in the province of Ontario by \$5 billion. This is not going to help businesses that are struggling today.” That’s Monsieur McGuinty. Maybe that was then—I don’t know—but that’s what he said. And I go on: “They are not paying corporate taxes today

because they are struggling—certain parts of the sector. Furthermore, they're not prepared to acknowledge that cutting \$5 billion out of our revenues means cuts to our schools, cuts to our hospitals, cuts to the programs that protect the most vulnerable, and cuts to protections for our environment. They're not prepared to acknowledge that. I am ... I won't go there," said mon ami Monsieur McGuinty, the Premier of this province. I say this because he said that on June 4, 2008—not long ago.

You notice how the Liberal members are no longer as attentive as they used to be when I was attacking the Tories, because when I was attacking the Tories, they were cheerful—"Go get them, Rosie"—and as soon as I attack them, they're busy talking to each other. Have you noticed? It's something that I noticed.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Looking glum.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Looking glum? They're silent.

I quote the Minister of Finance so that you would feel the pinch, so you would feel, "Jesus, what is he doing to me?" Right? What I remind a whole lot of Liberal members is that you probably had it out with him in your caucus meetings, because I'm sure about 25 of you had your hands around his neck, and that's not to say, "We love you" but to strangle him—just a guess. I think 25 of your members had your loving hands around his neck more than once. I could be wrong. If you think I'm wrong, correct me.

But I tell you, the corporate tax cuts of \$2.4 billion are in line with what Tories have done in the past and what Tories want in the present. It surprises me that they don't acknowledge it. It surprises me that they don't attack Jim Flaherty, our former friend from this chamber, that they do not attack Monsieur Harper—the federal Conservative leaders—and they cheerfully and happily say, "Oh, but they are the federal Conservatives, and we are the provincial Progressive Conservatives."

1700

Mr. John Yakabuski: You're back on us. Hey, Rosie, get back on them.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I like to go back and forth. It feels so good. It's like a seesaw, right? I just can't help it. I just can't help myself.

I've been thinking all along that every time the Tories ask a question in this Legislature about a harmonization issue that they supported with John Tory and Bob Runciman in principle, every time they attack this harmonization and I hear the Premier and the Minister of Finance respond, they never once—except once—hardly ever do they say, "We've done this in cahoots with Jim Flaherty. We've done this in collusion with Monsieur Harper, in agreement with the two of them, and we did this a long time ago." Do you notice, they never mention their names? Do you know why? Let me tell you. There has been a tacit agreement that they would not criticize each other. I dare say that there was a stipulation that if Flaherty gave you the \$4 billion, you would just shut your mouth and not criticize him ever—not now, not ever, not once, not twice, not ever. That was the agree-

ment that Duncan and Jim had: "We give you \$4 billion and we silence everyone, including the ministers and the Liberal MPPs," who will never dare mention their names because to do so would be to breach a contract.

Two-point-four billion bucks to corporations, and a harmonization tax that's going to whack a whole lot of middle-class people in perpetuity—we're talking about eternal whacking of the middle class when it comes to issues of energy, gasoline, heating fuels, conferences and seminars, footwear costing \$30 or less, prepared foods sold for \$4 or less, new homes over \$500,000, which is the case in Toronto, where every home is over \$500,000. You're going to get whacked with another 8% tax on \$500,000—whacked.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: On new houses.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: On homes over \$500,000.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: On new homes.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: On new homes, and on the other ones, 2%. It's a whole lot of whacking that you're going to give them. Professional services, rentals of commercial property, real estate commissions—this is a consumption tax. It's built in.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Yeah?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Mike says, "Yeah?" as if he's waiting for the answer.

It's a consumption tax. There is built-in inequity. You're whacking people, and it's not based on ability to pay. A whole lot of people in the middle are going to be whacked forever. The people who should be paying more are people like us and those folks who earn over \$100,000. These are the people who should be paying. These are the people they should be taxing, not the whole middle class with a consumption tax in perpetuity, and that's what you're doing. You're doing that because you're afraid to tax income.

You think you're going to get away with taxing the middle class on consumption? It's going to be a beautiful battle in the next little while, because a whole lot of people are going to come after this government, and that, I take a whole lot of pleasure in because you're doing it unfairly and unjustly. People like me and the New Democrats are going to be with them against the Liberal government. We'll be reminding them that the Conservatives provincially had a position and that Jim Flaherty and Monsieur Harper are with the Liberals like this. We're going to do that in the next couple of months for sure, if not a year or two.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you for permitting me to stand up in my place and speak against the motion being tabled or proposed by the leader of the opposition. I listened to him carefully when he was talking about his motion. I listened to many different speakers from the opposition party and the third party speaking in different modes and different ways.

I congratulate my colleague the PA for the Minister of Finance for outlining why he was speaking against this

motion. I definitely support his concerns and his position in this matter.

This is important for all of us in the province of Ontario. We don't have any enemy except one: how to fight poverty, how to create jobs, how to advance the people of this province of Ontario. That's why this budget came to speak to all these elements and this issue which we are facing at the present time in Ontario.

I know the opposition members support part of the budget, but they don't support the other part. They support tax cuts for the businesses, but they don't support investment in our communities, in our hospitals, in our education system, in innovation and research in Ontario. It's important for all of us to continue the support for the most important elements of our society. If this budget passes, it will create a massive investment in our infrastructure, which we need badly in this province. If we decided not to run a deficit, we could, to the member opposite, but we choose to continue—

Hon. Ted McMeekin: We'd just have to slash everything.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Yes, we'd have to slash infrastructure, education, health care, everything in the province of Ontario. So we decided to invest in our infrastructure because infrastructure is important for all of us in Ontario. Yesterday we were talking about Metrolinx, creating a transportation authority to make sure the congestion inside and outside Toronto would be eliminated or reduced. It's important for our economy also to widen our highways, fix our bridges, rebuild the sewer system and repave most of the highways and roads in Ontario. It's important for us, for a prosperous future in this province.

We could choose not to invest in health care. But many people cannot visit hospitals, cannot be treated, cannot find a doctor, cannot find a nurse, so we choose otherwise; we choose to continue to invest in the health care system.

We could choose not to invest in research and innovation, but all the researchers and all the economists told us that Ontario cannot be prosperous, cannot move to the next century, without investing in future jobs, and the jobs can be created by the researchers and innovators in Ontario. That's why we made a massive investment in this area.

We could choose not to invest in our education system, but many thousands and thousands of our students would not be able to pursue post-secondary education, so we decided to continue our investment. This year, if this budget passes, more than 50,000 extra students will have a chance to continue their post-secondary education.

We talk about harmonization of taxes in this province, and I know it's part of the package. It's important to continue to create an environment for business to be welcome in this community, to harmonize the taxes. It's important to our community to create some kind of tax cut for the businesses. It's important for our businesses to be prosperous in this province, especially in this challenging economic time.

Also, for middle-income families, there will be more than \$260 in savings on a yearly basis when they file their taxes, due to our lowering the tax bracket for those people, increasing it from \$24,000 to \$36,000.

This budget is important to all people; it's important to all communities. This province faces some difficult times. It's in difficult times that the leadership emerges and takes very tough and difficult decisions. That's why this budget came: to explain our circumstances in the province, to tell us about the importance of the future. That's why we came to invest in education, in health care, in child care and in infrastructure, and also, at the same time, to reduce poverty in the province of Ontario.

I was honoured and thrilled when I heard the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing announce, in conjunction with the federal government, a \$1.2-billion investment in affordable homes across the province. I think that's a great investment: to maintain the stock we have and to build more houses for middle-income people, the working poor and the people who are not able to rent a house at full price, at the market price.

I know that whatever you do, some people are going to find it difficult, but when you explain our strategy, our plan for the future, to the people of Ontario, I think the people will believe it.

1710

Since the Minister of Transportation is with us today, I want to congratulate him on behalf of all of us, and on behalf of the people of my riding of London—Fanshawe, because yesterday he introduced an important element of his ministry: the new authority for transportation that allows people to come into and out of Toronto in a fast and professional way.

It doesn't matter what you do in life: Some people are going to stand with you, and some people are going to go against it. I was puzzled by the Conservatives when they stood up and spoke against it. Most of the time they say, "We are with tax cuts, we are with this and this and all this stuff," and now, when we are trying to invest in our businesses, they stand against it.

Also, my colleagues from the third party—from Trinity-Spadina and Beaches-East York—stood in their places and spoke, and I listened to them carefully. He listed many different items, and I don't know if they exist or not. I'm not sure if they're correct and accurate or not, but I want to tell you something very important: Most of the food when you go to a restaurant was taxable to start with, so we didn't add anything to it except for \$3.99 and below. Most of the time, burgers are almost \$7, not \$3.99, so it was taxable to start with. Almost everything he mentioned was taxable before. When we talk about a single tax, it means we're talking about the same taxes that were implemented before and will be applied in the future, with exemptions for the most important elements and products that would affect kids and the vulnerable people among us in the province of Ontario.

I outlined why I am against this motion. This motion will put obstacles against many different businesses in Ontario. It will prevent them from progressing and from

being welcome in the province of Ontario. This motion speaks about, "Don't run up deficits, but also don't invest in anything. Let people worry about themselves." That's not our approach. Our approach is to continue our investment regardless, and especially in a tough time like we are facing in the province of Ontario. Our duty and obligation is to continue to invest to stimulate the economy because it's important to all of us. It's important for us.

The hospital in your place, member from Oxford—I think that building a hospital is good for your people, for your constituents. Also, the school and the road you have—all of these elements are important. If you don't invest in them at the present time, do you know what's going to happen? The economy is going to go backwards; it's not going to progress. That's why you have to create all this infrastructure to welcome Toyota, which opened in your riding. Not a long time ago, I think, they requested wider roads and many bridges.

I think what we do at the present time is important to stimulate the economy, build confidence in the people of Ontario and also welcome businesses from around the globe to come and invest in this prosperous province. That's why I'm not supporting this motion. Hopefully, my colleagues and others will follow me in not supporting it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to join the debate on our party's opposition day motion. The Leader of the Opposition has outlined the massive increases in spending and debt under this government. Generations of Ontarians will have to pay taxes to pay off this government's wasteful spending.

One of the worst facts about this government's over-spending and overtaxing is that it did not start as a result of the current recession; it started as soon as the Liberal government took power. Since 2003, the government has increased its spending by about 40%, and the debt will go up to more than \$200 billion. You instituted new taxes in your first budget, and in the budget last week, you have put in even more new taxes. So far, your new taxes have never been enough to pay for your spending increases.

Some of the government's increases pay for needed and necessary programs, but a lot of the money has gone to slush funds and year-end spending sprees. The Auditor General, in his reports, has repeatedly listed examples of this government's year-end spending sprees. He reported that in March 2005 the government entered into a number of transfer payment arrangements that raised the year's deficit by almost \$1 billion. In March 2006, the government's year-end spending spree totalled \$1.6 billion. And 2007, of course, was the year of the slush fund. The former Minister of Citizenship was caught handing out money without any application process or controls. The auditor investigated and said he found, "The grant decision-making processes used were not open, transparent or accountable." The decision as to who got what was often based on conversations rather than appli-

cations. The overall year-end spending spree in 2007: \$1.6 billion.

All of these examples I have given from the auditor's report illustrate the incompetence of this government's financial planning. It's not just a question of deficits or surpluses. This government is not spending money to meet actual needs. It is spending money at the end of the year to match early budget numbers. Billions and billions of dollars go out the door at the end of the year. How do we know that the money is spent on projects that are necessary? The whole point of financial planning is to spend money wisely, to spend money on priority projects. The poor financial planning of this government at the end of the year calls into question all of their spending choices. If this government was a government of principles and ideas, they would have a guide to making decisions. That's what our party and our PC government offered the people of Ontario when we were in power.

Members opposite often point out that we ran deficits when we took office in 1995. That is true. We had to clean up the mess left behind by the Bob Rae government. We cut taxes, which may have delayed eliminating the deficit, yet our tax cuts caused economic growth which actually increased our revenues. This is because we had a plan in 1995. The voters put us in office because of this plan.

In eight years, we achieved massive economic growth. We took 725,000 people off the tax rolls and hundreds of thousands off the welfare rolls. The achievement which I am most proud of: Between 1995 and 2000, as reported independently by Statistics Canada, the PC government took more than a quarter of a million people out of poverty.

Members opposite should ask themselves if they can say the same of their policies. Have your taxing and spending and huge deficits taken a quarter of a million people out of poverty? If you have and you can prove it, I think you should tell us. You know you have not. Billions of dollars in your spending have gone for waste.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? The member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore. I would ask the members between me and the member to—thank you.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'm pleased to take a few minutes and join in the debate today and talk to the Legislature about what's important to my constituents in Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

I can tell you that it is of critical importance to my constituents in Etobicoke—Lakeshore that our government is taking steps to preserve and create jobs, and that is, for me, the highlight of all of the steps undertaken in this year's budget. Through \$34 billion in infrastructure and other stimulus, jobs will be created in Ontario: \$32.5 billion in infrastructure investments over two years, supporting more than 300,000 jobs.

I had the opportunity to join the Premier and Minister Smitherman at St. Joseph's hospital just outside my community, a health care institution that serves our community very well, amongst others that we have, and to

learn from those individuals and see directly, speak to the construction workers, speak to those who will directly benefit from that infrastructure dollar funding and how much it means to them to know that after this project there will be another project and that the government is accelerating investment dollars out in our communities to ensure that jobs will be there for them and their families.

In addition, there's \$750 million over two years for job creation and skills training, including apprenticeship training, tax credits, the most generous in Canada—again, jobs and training available for people to make a future for themselves and their families.

1720

We recognize and understand that summer jobs are of critical importance. If university and college students don't have the opportunity to earn money over the summer, they won't be able to continue to go to school. The summer job opportunities for youth will be expanded by 57% this summer, helping more than 100,000 young Ontarians get a job so that they can have a way to get themselves through the summer and through school in the upcoming year.

There is additional support in the budget for the manufacturing, forest products, mining, agricultural and small business sectors. Those initiatives are of critical importance to my constituents in Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

I also had an opportunity, immediately following the budget, to join with my colleagues Donna Cansfield and Shafiq Qaadri and have a town hall meeting in Etobicoke, an Etobicoke-wide meeting to answer questions with regard to the budget. In that meeting, I talked about the comprehensive tax reform package and why it was part of ensuring a stronger economy for tomorrow, a critical element to job creation and preservation.

I want to turn to a well-known expert in our city, Roger Martin, who recently wrote an opinion piece in the *Toronto Star*. Roger Martin, who is from the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity, talked about the fact that this budget was about jobs. This is what he said:

"The recent Ontario budget represents an exceedingly important step forward with its bold tax measures that will benefit all Ontarians. Businesses, consumers and families should be delighted with the leadership this government has shown.

"For us, the most positive feature is the impact it will have on new business investment and, therefore, jobs and wages.

"We need more investment by Ontario businesses to improve prosperity for the average Ontarian"—like those who live in my community.

He went on to say, "If we want higher wages and more secure jobs, we need more investment by our businesses."

He asked rhetorically, "Do taxes affect investments? There's plenty of research by tax experts and other economists to show that new business investments are increased when taxes on them are reduced....

"By changing our provincial sales tax to a value-added tax, Ontario will eliminate those taxes on business invest-

ments and other inputs. When Quebec and the three Atlantic provinces made this conversion, they saw their business investment jump 11%....

"What about the charge that the conversion to a harmonized sales tax and the reduction in corporate income taxes are just part of a business agenda? This doesn't stand up to scrutiny because the research indicates that most corporate taxes are borne by workers.

"This occurs in two ways. First, firms are able to pass on a significant portion of the additional costs of corporate taxation to their employees in the form of lower wages. Second, as we have said, workers suffer from high corporate taxes as the lower investment in productivity- and wage-enhancing investments in machinery, equipment, and software hurts job creation and wages.

"Lowering taxes on business investment isn't 'business friendly,' it's Ontario friendly. The government took very bold action when the easier but less productive political strategy would have been to wait until conditions are better. Many argue that governments can't be bold; can't do the right thing because it isn't politically saleable. This government, with this budget, shows that to be the view of defeatists. Congratulations."

Those are the words of Roger Martin of the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity.

I think that the constituents in Etobicoke–Lakeshore also understood, when we had an opportunity to go through the actual models of how the new tax reforms would positively affect them, that they had really been done a disservice by those in the opposition and otherwise who had sought to simplify this issue. This is comprehensive tax reform. It is the alteration of a retail sales tax system that has been in place since the early 1960s—and I would suggest to you that the world has changed a great deal since 1961.

The combined impacts of the proposed sales tax changes and the tax relief for Ontarians are significant, and in the minutes that I have remaining, I'll just give one or two examples. For a couple who earns \$70,000 and has two children, the impact of the single sales tax, without any of the other comprehensive reform, would cost them \$420. When you combine the credits and the personal income tax cuts that are available to them in the first year, they will benefit by \$1,360, with a net impact of \$940 to the positive. Three years later, as we move out of our transition period, the impact of the single sales tax would have been a loss to that family unit of \$130. When you combine the credits and the personal income tax cuts, they are to the good by \$695, with a net benefit—a positive impact—of \$565. That family represents the constituents that I am pleased in many ways to represent.

We look at another family: a single parent with one child earning \$25,000 a year, for example. That parent would benefit, net impact, in the first year by \$1,105, and by the third year by \$570 in a positive mechanism.

It is important that Ontarians understand the comprehensive nature of this. It will benefit our province and it will benefit 93% of Ontario families, families that I am

pleased to represent in Etobicoke–Lakeshore. In the long run, it's an important, bold and positive step forward. I'm very pleased to stand today in support of the budget and in opposition to the opposition motion being brought forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to begin by restating some remarks taken from the Hansard of December 1990, more than 18 years ago:

"We in Wellington understand the economic value of hard work and the social value of personal responsibility. From this understanding stems a serious concern when our government refuses to live within its means, when our government grows until it begins to inhibit overall economic growth, when even excessive taxation does not prevent the expansion of government debt."

This passage from Hansard is taken from my maiden speech in the Legislature. I wanted that speech to be a thoughtful presentation which touched on the most fundamental values of people I've felt so privileged to represent. I believe that those words ring as true today as they did in 1990, but I regret to say that our government, the present McGuinty government in particular, has abjectly failed to live within its means.

As my colleague the member from Leeds–Grenville has demonstrated with this motion and with his comments, this Liberal government has failed to reduce debt even in good times. My constituents in Wellington–Halton Hills know that reducing debt in good times is the best way to prepare for tough times. It's a common-sense philosophy for most households, farms and small businesses, but it's one that this government has all but ignored.

One of my points of reference is the year 1987. That year, I began working full-time for my predecessor, Jack Johnson, then the MPP for Wellington—as fine a man as I've ever known. At that time, the province's accumulated deficit, the terminology used at the time to measure the provincial debt, stood at just over \$34 billion. In other words, it took from 1867 to 1987—that's 120 years—to ring up a debt of \$34 billion.

Incredibly, the McGuinty government's latest budget papers, on page 146, show that when the McGuinty government comes to a merciful end in 2011, the total debt is projected to be \$236 billion. In the time that I've been here at Queen's Park, the total debt of the province has exploded by a factor of seven. I say again: It will have gone up from \$34 billion to \$236 billion—an increase of almost seven times. I wonder what future generations will say about this government's leadership on money matters and its selfish inability to live within our means. I think I can guess.

In this debate, does the McGuinty government deny that they have grown our debt by \$66 billion in six years? Would anyone believe them if they did? By any measure, the McGuinty government's fiscal record is atrocious. It suggests to me that this government is without a sense of responsibility to our future and our children's future—a future that this government has mortgaged to the hilt.

Some members may recall that in 1997 I introduced a motion in this House calling on the government to commit itself to pay off the provincial debt over a 25-year period, which would have included interim targets. It passed with the support of the House and, during our term of government, provincial debt was actually paid down.

When this government was elected in 2003, I questioned their commitment to fiscal responsibility, so I brought forward a debt retirement motion again, but it was defeated when every single Liberal member voted against it, as I believe they were instructed to do.

This is the challenge of our time. When the McGuinty government took office, it couldn't wait to open the vault and spend: spend with abandon, spend with impunity, spend like there was no tomorrow. Well, tomorrow is now here, and if the government had any sense of contrition it would acknowledge its poor financial management, it would renounce its record of fiscal profligacy, it would apologize to Ontarians and it would vote to support this motion.

1730

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: It is a pleasure for me to get a few minutes on the record today on this motion. It's interesting; I know one of the things that we talked about when we had the opportunity to be at OGRA/ROMA at the end of February this year to consult with many of our rural municipal politicians—one of the things that was particularly clear at that time was the need to make additional infrastructure investments in the province of Ontario.

We all know that there has been a considerable inventory of projects across the province—water, waste water treatment plants, sewers, roads and bridges—and one of the things that is certainly a unifier for those individuals from elected councils from smaller parts of Ontario is the need to put additional money into infrastructure.

Over the next two years, indeed, we'll put some \$32.5 billion into that area in the province of Ontario to effectively renew many of our communities across Ontario. There has been some criticism about the fact that we are and will be running a deficit over the next number of years, but those key investments that we'll be making over the next little while will pay enormous dividends down the road for future generations to come. Many people who have the foresight to see the wisdom in these investments are certainly coming to the forefront. They have been reported in various media outlets—that indeed this is the right decision for our government at this particular time.

It's interesting to note also that we're making additional investments in community colleges, universities and skill training in the province of Ontario. Effectively, what we're doing is establishing a positive foundation for the future.

We are also giving municipalities new opportunities. On October 31, 2008, the Minister of Municipal Affairs

and Housing signed a landmark protocol agreement which will continue the upload of services off the backs of property taxpayers of the province of Ontario and back to the province, where those services really belong and payment should be made.

So, when you look at our budget and some of the very positive initiatives in the budget, you can see that we are indeed setting the course, I think, for a positive future direction, to create an economic climate that's very positive for Ontario to emerge even stronger and better as we get through these economic challenges.

I had a couple of moments there and I'm pleased to get my thoughts on the record this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Speaker, you will know that my colleagues and I have stood on numerous occasions in this Legislature over the past year warning the McGuinty government to save for a rainy day. All of those present across the way seemed so comfortable in their little world; they seemed to have no idea of what was occurring as they taxed and spent their way across this great province of Ontario.

I've told members opposite about the southwestern Ontario tobacco farmers and, of course, Ontario's hog producers, our cattlemen, our hort producers who have been going under. We've talked about the fact that Skil saws and hammers have been silenced in Haldimand county because of an illegal native occupation, an occupation that this government continues to neglect. I've talked about car dealerships in Delhi. We've lost all three new-car dealerships in the town of Delhi.

The e-mails that we receive in our constituency offices—people worried about their jobs and worried about their family's future; they were right. On this side of the House, I feel we were right over the past year or two. The question is, how could people across Ontario see this coming and the government could not see this coming? You allowed Ontario to sail into this recession with very high tax rates, a ballooning public sector and a staggering rate of private sector job loss. You put yourselves in such a bad position to deal with this recession because of your ignorance and your neglect, and now Ontarians are facing a McGuinty plan of seven years of red ink, a \$56.8-billion deficit during that time.

This government needs to admit that it failed to plan; it basically appears to have given up. There's no real discussion about any real plan. In the 2009 budget very recently, we heard news of an \$18-billion deficit over two years and a \$200-billion-plus debt. It really does look like the finance minister and the Premier have panicked.

You can't spend your way out of have-not status. You can't spend your way out of a recession. The debt load now for every man, woman and child in the province of Ontario is sitting at \$15,400. That's unbelievable. What if we in Ontario ran our households that way? There's that expression, "You dig your own hole," and we've certainly seen it in the past year.

This fiscal chaos was avoidable. Had you stuck to your spending targets, there would be no deficit. Spending by more than twice the rate of inflation and spending by more than twice the rate of population growth is obviously unsustainable.

While Mr. McGuinty attempts to tax, spend, borrow and regulate his way out of this crisis, this recession, this have-not status, he is penalizing every single working family across the province of Ontario. All of us are being nicked and dined to death.

Have the members opposite ever heard of the word "restraint"? I suggest that you learn what that word means, because those of us who live in the province Ontario cannot afford another two years of taxing and spending and borrowing. Again, today is April Fool's Day. The only joke in this House is this government's lack of planning. The only joke here is the government of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I just wanted to intervene very briefly in this debate to say that this budget deserves serious consideration. I turned on my television last night, as I have on many nights, and sometimes you'll see some news out of Buffalo or sometimes you'll see some news out of Detroit. Sometimes you'll see some news out of Sacramento. These are serious times, and they demand serious measures.

The province of Ontario is in those difficult times, and we are taking a responsible position to get out of it. That's what this budget is about. It's about families in Ontario; it's about jobs in Ontario; it's about prosperity in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's my pleasure to speak to this opposition day motion here at Queen's Park this afternoon.

As our leader said earlier today, this motion is about the failure of this government to deal with a debt reduction plan and what we're going to be dealing with as a deficit in this province as a result of the McGuinty government's mismanagement of our finances.

Had they adopted Progressive Conservative policies or policies that we as Progressive Conservatives were recommending over the last few years, we wouldn't be in the mess that we're in today; we would be in a far better position to weather the kind of economic storm that has beset us at this time. But as our leader said the other day, they had the revenue, they had the money and they spent it like drunken sailors. Any way they could get it out the door, they got it out the door. In fact, if you recall—and I know my colleague from Carleton-Mississippi Mills has said this before, how they went on spending sprees at the end of the year just to get money out the door so that they wouldn't show surpluses.

1740

Now the hard times have hit. Now you have to show leadership. And what are they doing? They're showing

confusion. They really don't know what they want to do. The Premier has put us on a path where the debt in this province is going to amount to \$15,400 for every man, woman and child in this province—\$15,400. Tell that to a family, a husband and wife and four children. Well, that's six people, that's \$90,000-plus, the debt for a relatively average Ontario family.

Mr. Michael Prue: Four children is average?

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's what we have, four, so we make up for those who have less.

Mr. Michael Prue: The average is about two—

Mr. John Yakabuski: The member from Beaches—East York is chiding me about the size of the average family. I came from a family of 14; four is small. But for a family of four children and two parents, it's a \$90,000 debt as a result of the McGuinty government's policies.

When I talk about confusion, just think about what the confusion was like in the Liberal caucus room last week when the Premier had to explain to his caucus how on March 10 he told them, "No, no; nothing has been decided. We're just thinking about a few kinds of things we might do. One might be the harmonization of the sales tax, but no, no, we won't do anything about that without talking to you," and then they find out that the Minister of Finance signed an agreement with the federal Minister of Finance the very same day. If you want to talk about confusion, there must have been some confusion in that Liberal caucus room. The question they must have been asking was, "Does this guy care about how we feel, or does he know what he's doing, or is the Minister of Finance running the province and the Premier's just along for the ride?" Well, quite frankly, when speaking of rides, it's the people of Ontario who are being taken for one under this government.

Let's talk about that HST, taxes on a myriad of goods and services that were not subject to provincial sales tax before: gasoline—and now they're talking about transit programs and big spending on transit, massive spending on transit. Where's the money for rural Ontario? You know what rural Ontario's going to get? More taxes, because the transportation infrastructure of rural Ontario is highways—roads, bridges, highways. What is rural Ontario going to get? Not only are they not getting their share of the gas tax—and I will be presenting a bill again in this House in the very near future so that rural Ontario can get a fair share of that gas tax. But not only are they not getting a fair share of that; they are now going to be subject to an 8% further tax on top of the taxes that are on gasoline already. That's what rural Ontario and rural people are going to be getting in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

Your hydro bills—is a hydro bill a luxury? No. Cable TV for most people today is not even a luxury. But you know what? If you have to, if you want, you can shut off the cable. You can call up Rogers or Cogeco or whoever supplies you and say, "Disconnect the cable. We can't afford it." Nobody can disconnect the hydro in this province, but your hydro bills, in addition to the massive increases that are going to be a result of the Green

Energy Act in this province, are also going to be subject to an 8% tax on top of the tax, on top of the tax and the debt retirement, which is taxed, and all of the GST, on which we're taxed again under Dalton McGuinty's plan for tax harmonization.

Tax "harmonization"? You got the first part right for small-town, rural and working families in this province. You got the first part of the word right: "Harm," yes, in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak against this motion.

I want to share with you and with this House my vision for Ontario. My vision for Ontario is a strong Ontario within Canada. My vision for Ontario is a prosperous Ontario. My vision for Ontario is a caring and compassionate Ontario, an Ontario which can compete in this global world, both in terms of the businesses which are here to create prosperity and provide jobs, and also in terms of the calibre, the quality of people who live in this province.

The whole global economic order has changed. We have often talked in this House about how things are changing around us. What we are seeing today in terms of global recession is not something that is only happening here in Ontario. This is larger than this province. This is larger than this country. This is a global phenomenon.

That is why it is imperative that we look for solutions that provide a reprieve for Ontarians, for workers, for our families, in the short term, and that we put fundamental principles in place that will benefit and grow this province in the long term. This is our opportunity to ensure that this province grows so that all these children who are part of the page program in this Legislature can benefit from this strong, prosperous, caring and compassionate Ontario.

That is why, in this budget, this government has provided for a rigorous stimulation package to renew our infrastructure across this province, from rural towns and small towns to large urban centres, from providing public transit in cities like Toronto and my city of Ottawa to ensuring that there are good roads, there is good community infrastructure for our communities to use.

That is why we are proposing to invest \$32.5 billion in necessary public and community infrastructure upgrades which will benefit us all, not in the short term but in the long term, for future generations to enjoy.

In terms of the long-term well-being of this province, we are proposing very comprehensive tax reforms in this province, tax reforms that are going to ensure that Ontario is a competitive place to do business.

I, in a past life, as many know, was a lawyer, and I practised particularly in international trade law. I had the opportunity to work with multinational corporations and, for other countries, to advise how they can do business in Canada. We are in an extremely globally competitive world today, and we need to make sure that Ontario has

the right tools, has the right conditions to attract new investment.

I firmly believe that this particular budget, these tax reform measures which have been introduced, will allow Ontario to grow in the long term, to ensure that there are strong, long-term jobs available for Ontarians, that the prosperity will grow, that these companies who will create these jobs will pay taxes. And what will we do with those taxes, Mr. Speaker? We will invest back in our public programs like health care and education, programs which are essential to the well-being of this province and the people who live in this province. It's as simple as that. We want to make sure that the economy is strong, that the economy is creating jobs, and those companies are paying taxes, because those taxes pay for our public programs, for our health care and our education.

If we start cutting, as the opposition suggests, then where are we cutting? Are we firing nurses? Are we firing doctors? Are we firing teachers? Absolutely not. That is not the caring and compassionate province I hope for and I am working towards.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Runciman has moved opposition day number one. Is it is the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1750 to 1800.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those in favour, please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Hardeman, Ernie

Miller, Norm
Munro, Julia
O'Toole, John
Runciman, Robert W.

Sterling, Norman W.
Yakubuski, John

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those opposed, please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bentley, Christopher
Bradley, James J.
Brotten, Laurel C.
Brown, Michael A.
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Carroll, Aileen
Colle, Mike
Craitor, Kim
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
DiNovo, Cheri
Dombrowsky, Leona

Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Gerretsen, John
Gélinas, France
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Johnson, Rick
Kular, Kuldip
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Marchese, Rosario
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McMeekin, Ted
Meilleur, Madeleine
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol

Moridi, Reza
Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziotti, David
Phillips, Gerry
Prue, Michael
Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Ruprecht, Tony
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Monique
Sousa, Charles
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 10; the nays are 52.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negated.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): This House is adjourned until Thursday, April 2, at 9 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1803.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Broten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craiton, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
		Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
		Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
		Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	

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Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Johnson, Rick (LIB)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	

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Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of International Trade and Investment / Ministre du Commerce international et de l'Investissement
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme
		Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier / Vice-premier ministre
		Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services / Ministre des Petites Entreprises et des Services aux consommateurs
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Perth–Wellington	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
		Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

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Gilles Bisson, Bob Delaney
Garfield Dunlop, Kevin Daniel Flynn
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Phil McNeely, Yasir Naqvi
John O'Toole
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Joyce Savoline
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Lisa MacLeod, Gerry Martiniuk
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Laura Albanese, Bas Balkissoon
Bob Delaney, Joe Dickson
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Norm Miller, Mario Sergio
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Rick Johnson, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Yasir Naqvi, Michael Prue
Tony Ruprecht, Mario Sergio
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Vic Dhillon, Cheri DiNovo
Helena Jaczek, Shafiq Qaadri
Khalil Ramal, Peter Shurman
Elizabeth Witmer
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Howard Hampton, Greg Sorbara
Norman W. Sterling, David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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Helena Jaczek, Sylvia Jones
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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 2 April 2009

Jeudi 2 avril 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 2 April 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 2 avril 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the non-denominational prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREATER TORONTO AND HAMILTON AREA TRANSIT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2009 LOI DE 2009 SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU RÉSEAU DE TRANSPORT EN COMMUN DE LA RÉGION DU GRAND TORONTO ET DE HAMILTON

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 1, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 163, An Act to amend the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority Act, 2006 / Projet de loi 163, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la Régie des transports du grand Toronto.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I would like to preface any remarks I might have: I'm seeking unanimous consent to hold down the NDP lead, as our member is not here today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Michael Prue: I woke up this morning to a brave new world. I opened up the front page of the Toronto Star and I saw an announcement that had been announced before, but actually there seemed to be some meat on the bones. There actually seemed to be a date, and that's something I've not been used to seeing.

I want to start off any comments I have here on this whole thing about Metrolinx and GO Transit and Bill 163 with a clear understanding that we have to do what is being proposed and we have to do it in the most expeditious and fastest manner possible. Gridlock is killing the greater GTA, it is killing Toronto. It is costing some \$2 billion in lost productivity. It is costing the city, the greater Toronto area and southern Ontario enormous opportunities. When and if we come out of this current recession/ depression, it is important that things are moving quickly.

I looked at the dates—2013, 2015, 2016—that were proposed on the front page of the Toronto Star, and I can only hope that we can even speed those up. I know that would be ambitious, but it would put literally tens of

thousands of people to work; it would give an opportunity to get people out of their cars.

Having said that, I want to deal with the meat of Bill 163. It is far from clear to me that the forced merger between GO Transit and Metrolinx proposed in Bill 163 will address the real reasons for the McGuinty government's failure in the past to move on public transit. I know that the mayor of the city of Toronto, although he is lauding the developments of yesterday and into this morning, was very critical of this government for taking the unusual step that it did to take elected people off the board: to force the merger and, in so doing, take all of the elected representatives who had been on the board in the past off.

I want to talk about my own city, Toronto, where I have lived most of my life, save and except the little more than a year that I spent living in Ottawa. Toronto is probably one of the most expensive cities in all of Canada and in all of North America for monthly passes. The monthly pass in Toronto is exceptionally high. If you go to other cities and see what they have in Montreal, Ottawa and Vancouver in terms of monthly passes, you will see that Toronto ranks too high, near the top. We are anxious to get people out of their cars daily. We are anxious for as many people as can to use a monthly Metropass and to get on the subway, the streetcars and the buses daily. It is not going to work if we continue to have monthly passes that are higher than everyone else's. We have to find ways, and this government has to find ways, of reducing that.

The government of Ontario once paid more than half of all transit costs and it now pays only one third. I would suggest that if the government is serious about not only building the new structures of the future, not only putting a line along Eglinton Avenue out to the airport, not only building Finch and not only extending the Scarborough LRT, then the government has to also look at covering the transit costs. These are very, very high, we need to pay a higher amount. In some cities in Europe, quite literally, the government pays almost everything, so that you can get on streetcars in some places in Europe and Japan for a very, very small amount of money. It doesn't cover the cost of the ride—because the cities, municipalities and governments of those countries and provinces understand full well the necessity of building the transit system and having the transit system be economical so that people will want to get out of their cars.

Between 1998 and 2004, TTC fares increased by 14%, while the city's transit operating subsidy decreased by 17%. That is the reality of what happened over those

years. From 2004 to 2007, Toronto Transit Commission cash fares increased by 75 cents and the monthly pass reached above \$100. This cemented the TTC as one of the most expensive public transit systems to ride when compared to other North American cities. Meanwhile, capital spending on roads has increased by 57%, and it appears that the government, up until that period of time, up until perhaps yesterday, was more intent upon building roads where people would drive their cars rather than on building transit systems that would be non-polluting, electric, easily accessible and cheap.

We know that the fare hikes reduce ridership, which in the long run leads to service cutbacks. We saw that whole round a couple of years ago, where service cutbacks of buses, streetcars and even in some cases of subways, by running them less frequently, not running them at night, produced crowding and people looking for alternatives. Hopefully, some of them would carpool, but the majority would get back into their cars. This was causing some grave gridlock.

I'm glad to see that over the last few years, people are starting to get back on to the transit system in this city and I would hope in cities with which I am less familiar across this entire province. But we know that every time fares increase, transit ridership goes down. It doesn't matter whether that's in Toronto or London or Peterborough; it doesn't matter whether it's in Ottawa or Hamilton or Sarnia—it doesn't matter. When the fares go up, the ridership goes down. One of the key things is not only to build the new structures, but to ensure that the fares remain doable, to ensure that the fares are affordable to people and provide a better alternative than the use of the private automobile.

0910

We know that having fare hikes means more cars on the road, and that in turn causes dirtier air and more children with asthma. Asthma has been an epidemic, in terms of the number of children and the number of people in our society who are getting asthma today, as opposed to 20 or 30 or 40 years ago. It was a relatively rare phenomenon; today, it is commonplace. I invite any of you to go into schools and see the number of children who come to school every day with puffers. That's really quite shocking. It was not the norm and it was not happening even 20 years ago.

Our current over-congested, car-based system is costing us billions of dollars, as I've said—a year in lost productivity. We see the expansion of public transit as the way to create well-paying jobs in Ontario. The whole question of Metrolinx: The implementation of Metrolinx's regional transportation plan would create some 430,000 jobs, we've been told; 17,000 in the first year alone.

I want to talk for a minute about the announcement yesterday. I want to talk about the ambitious plan for Toronto, about building the three new electrified systems across the city, because I didn't see in that announcement—I saw the construction announcement; I saw the end dates; I saw the costs. I saw the \$9 billion; I saw the

\$3 million—contrast that to \$9 billion—for a study in Hamilton. Although I welcome what is happening in Toronto, which is, after all, the largest urban agglomeration in all of Ontario, I still think we need to be looking at other places, other large cities like Hamilton and Ottawa. We need to be more proactive than simply announcing a \$3-million study plan. I'm hoping that we do that, because as Toronto will probably show the way in terms of how the money is spent and how we electrify and how we get people out of their cars, that same thing has to happen literally in every single transit system across this province, and it has to happen in smaller-city Ontario. I would suggest starting with the next-largest cities of Ottawa and Hamilton, and going down from there.

I didn't see anything in the announcement about a buy-Ontario plan. I didn't see anything in there about buying the streetcars, the light rapid transit cars, that are going to be needed by the years 2013, 2015 and 2016. That was not part of the plan and it was not part of the announcement. And if it was, it certainly didn't make the Toronto Star; it certainly didn't make the news yesterday. I watched the news last night. I watched CP24. Adam Giambrone was on there talking about the plan, but he didn't talk—

Mr. John O'Toole: Adam Giambrone is one of the problems.

Mr. Michael Prue: My friend from Durham here—I don't know whether he's jealous or what, but he is talking about Mr. Giambrone in terms that I think are not fair, because Mr. Giambrone has a very difficult job, in the largest transit system in this entire country, in trying to put everything together to keep people on—

Mr. John O'Toole: He's trying to do what David Miller tells him.

Mr. Michael Prue: Oh, I'm hearing my friend from Durham saying that he only does what David Miller tells him to do. Well, I would suggest my friend from Durham is absolutely wrong. I don't know whether he has ever met Mr. Giambrone, but I want to tell you, Mr. Giambrone is many things, but one of them is not a puppet. Mr. Giambrone is a person of great integrity. Mr. Giambrone is a person who believes very passionately in public transit and very passionately in how to get the best bang for the buck for the people of Toronto, who, after all, pay the majority of the costs of the TTC system.

Having said that, we wonder about where the government's announcement is in terms of where those light rail vehicles are going to come from, because we have, on this side of the House and certainly in our party, advocated for a long time that these vehicles should be built in Ontario. It is essential that the vehicles be built in Ontario, not only for the safety and security of our people here but for the jobs that will come from them. We know that we have the capability in both Thunder Bay, with Bombardier, and in Hamilton to produce light rail cars. They should be produced here, and that should be part of the plan. We should be looking to start building those here, not waiting for some time or waiting for the lowest possible bid, but looking to start to build them here. We

are in a recession. We need to know, and the people who work there in the companies need to know that they will have a market to sell these.

I know that Bombardier produced the LRT vehicles for Toronto earlier. Those LRT vehicles, some of which were driverless, went on to be used in other places. They were pioneered here in Ontario, but they went on to be used in other places. They're now used in Vancouver; they're used in parts of the United States. It was that leading technology, that opportunity to build which made them into a world leader. I want to do the same thing, and I think we need to do the same thing. We need to be up-front and bold, and we need to say that what is going to be planned here will be the next generation, the brand new cars of the future, the LRT cars of the future, and that we want them to be built here.

We want the whole world, when they're looking at electrifying their systems, when they're looking at new streetcars and new LRTs, to say, "I think the place we need to go is Canada. I think the place we need to go is Ontario. I think we need to go to Hamilton and Thunder Bay to buy them, because they have the technology and the expertise and the skilled workers."

So it is a leap of faith. And might it cost more? Yes, it might. We can probably buy them cheaper in China. I'm telling you that right now; you know it and I know it and the TTC probably knows it and everybody else probably knows it too, because if you pay \$1 or \$2 an hour versus the living wage that we pay here in Ontario, it's bound to be cheaper. But I will tell you that if you want the technology of the future and want Ontario to be on the leading edge, then we have to take that leap of faith. We have to say that we want our workers to be employed and we want our workers to be there. We want to know that the people who pay the taxes for this Legislature, for the politicians who work in it, for the government, for all of the infrastructure that's going to take place, have jobs to do it.

So I'm asking the government, as part of the announcement yesterday, for that first step forward—or perhaps the second step, because they've already announced this before, but it seems to be becoming more and more pressing and the government is taking it stronger and stronger. They need to do it with a buy-in-Ontario policy. I'm suggesting that the current policy of having 25% produced in Ontario is simply not good enough.

I'm not talking about the whole thing, and I've heard the government spin about 82%; that's because it's 100% of the construction and 25% of the actual production. I'm talking about 100% of the construction and at least 50% of the manufacturing, because that is going to produce jobs in that key area and make us the technological leaders in Canada. These are wonderful opportunities for job creation through transit, but they have to be seized.

I've outlined a little bit about why we need to do this in terms of the economy. There are, of course, the environmental reasons. The environmental reasons are absolutely paramount because, as we know, Canada is a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol. The environment is

being degraded in many ways that oftentimes people are oblivious to, but we have to look at it. We see the news; we see the shrinking ice sheets; we see our iconic animal, the polar bear, being forced and squeezed into smaller and smaller spaces and the numbers starting to dwindle. We see whole areas of degradation of our environment and that we need to do something about it. Transit, and taking people out of their cars, will be a big step forward.

0920

I've also alluded a little bit to the health reasons: the puffers, the kids who have asthma. There are many health effects—not good ones—as a result of congestion, pollution and people in their cars that can be alleviated in a great way. Just as this government is committed, although they've taken so long and so many steps and so many back steps in getting rid of coal-fired generation—we need to, at the same time, do the same thing in terms of the automobile. I know that smarter heads around the world are looking to electrify cars. I know they're looking at lithium ion batteries. I know they're trying to do everything possible in order to reduce the consumption of carbon-based fuels. We need to do the same thing here in Ontario, and we need to electrify the systems. We need to do it for health reasons. We need to do it for environmental reasons and, I suggest, for economic ones as well.

The question is: Will Bill 163, as it stands, speed the implementation of a regional transit plan or not? This is where I have some difficulties, because we have left out elected officials. I know that the government perhaps was a little bit concerned that some were too parochial, that some were looking at their own towns, their own cities and not at the broader picture. But if that is the problem, then they should simply say so. The government should have told the respective councils, the respective mayors, that the representatives who were being sent there were too parochial. But to simply take people off the system, I would think, is a backward step. I would suggest that every time governments of any stripe have taken elected officials off boards or committees, it has been a retrograde step.

I do remember being for many years on the board of the Children's Aid Society here in Toronto. I was on the board when I was the mayor of the borough of East York and I continued on that board following the forced amalgamation of the municipalities into the megacity of Toronto. One day came along and the government of Ontario at the time, a Conservative government led by Mike Harris, said that the elected representatives were no longer going to be on the board of the Children's Aid Society.

I don't think that was a good step for children's aid because what happened to that board—and literally what has happened to every single board, including the transit board in Vancouver, which I'm going to get to in a second. People who were on that board, who were public officials, made sure that everything was open and everything was transparent. The meetings weren't held in secret, the meetings weren't by invitation only and the meetings always had notes that were accessible to every-

one because public officials could not participate unless that was the case. As soon as that happened, I have to tell you—although I don't have firsthand experience—I stopped seeing the minutes. I stopped seeing what was happening and I started to see that that board retrenched and became much more secretive and much more difficult for ordinary people to access. We have seen, over the last seven and a half years that I have been in this Legislature, many problems. The same thing has happened—I won't have time—to the equivalent of Metrolinx in Vancouver. The same thing happened as soon as they took the public officials off the board.

I would caution the government that we need to have them back on, and perhaps at committee somebody can move such a recommendation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before we do the questions and comments, I would like to welcome to the Legislature today Gilles Morin, the former member for Carleton East—a member of the 33rd, 34th, 35th and 36th provincial Parliaments. Mr. Morin served as Deputy Speaker during his tenure here. We welcome you here again today, sir.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'd certainly like to acknowledge that the member for Beaches–East York has a long-standing interest in the provision of public transit here in Toronto, first during his time as the mayor of the borough of East York and then, of course, moving on to Toronto council after the amalgamation.

There's no question that in my own hometown of Peterborough, actually, we're quite excited. Over the last number of years, we've used the gas tax money to expand our transit significantly. I want to pay respect to councillor Len Vass, who headed up the transit review of Peterborough, and of course my good friend, Mayor Paul Ayotte, whom I have served with.

One of the things that was unique about that—those who are familiar with Peterborough—coming into Peterborough—about a decade ago we developed the Major Bennett Industrial Park. You could debate the pros and cons of the value of call centres coming into the community, but we established a unique program in our social services division in the city of Peterborough to provide job-ready opportunities for a whole variety of people who haven't had their first job experience. We developed transit into Major Bennett Industrial Park. We established the opportunity for people getting that first job to indeed use public transit because many of them didn't have cars.

In terms of Metrolinx, Metrolinx has been tasked with the responsibility to look at the feasibility study of the proposal to extend rail service from Toronto to Peterborough. I know my friend from Durham is quite excited about that initiative. So we're looking at Metrolinx to take the lead, to get the consultant in place and to take a look. We look at the opportunity; I know the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan will be a real advocate for these rail cars to be manufactured in—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's always a pleasure to follow the member from Beaches–East York. I apologize if I crossed his path with speaking broadly about Adam Giambrone, a very capable young guy. I know that when he was the policy adviser for your caucus, he was extremely thorough.

I just want to make my point, which is that the real point here is that you have to really look behind the billboard sign. This is about the ninth time they've announced this money. If you trust anything the government says, you're going to find that perhaps in 2011 or 2012 there'll be a big hole in the ground going nowhere. I'm really concerned. This amount of money going out without the people—like David Miller acting surprised. It just shows the lack of concentration. They're trying to change the channel here to a big amount of money on transit to keep Toronto happy. This is changing the channel. I have very little trust left after several broken promises, including the HST.

Here is what they're saying in my riding of Durham. I'm going to try and represent my riding and their interests to the best of my abilities. “From Durham's perspective, there are significant gaps in the RTP (regional transportation plan)’ over the entire 25 years,” it was said at a regional council meeting.

“Regional chairman Roger Anderson agreed Durham isn't as well served with the plan.”

I listened to the member from Peterborough. This is all about large cities, which I have no problem with, but the gas taxes—one glaring example of how this province caters to the urban vote. There is nothing for rural Ontario in this. Carol Mitchell, you should be ashamed. There's nothing in your area for transit. I think of my riding and how we get—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member knows full well that he shouldn't use another member's name as opposed to her riding, if he's making reference to it.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: We're talking about Bill 163, An Act to amend the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority Act, 2006. I normally enjoy the comments that are made by the member from Beaches–East York because mostly he makes sense, but I am really puzzled today about his comments. And I don't even know where the Conservatives are on this because Frank Klees, a leadership candidate, says he's in favour—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to draw to your attention as well, apparently, that you should make reference to a member by his riding name, not by his first name or his last name.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Before I get sidetracked by the position of the Conservatives, because we are hearing two versions this morning, I expected that there would be one version, especially when the leadership candidate is saying he supports this plan 100%. He says, and I wish the member from Durham would listen to this, “It's not”—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I will have to caution the member because he's supposed to be making

reference to the original speech that was made by the member for Beaches–East York, not attacking another member.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I stand corrected. I got side-tracked by the party that speaks from both sides of its mouth.

But let's get back to the original comments by the member from Beaches–East York. I think he should be more positive, because today we know it's \$9 billion for transportation. It's the first time in the history of this province that this kind of money is being spent for transportation, and the member is not positive enough. I'd remind him that what's important to realize is that so many people will get jobs; I think he mentioned that to some degree. Secondly, we cannot hold this project up, and I hope his party will not be the one that will hold it up, because we're counting on them to support this bill.

0930

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'll return to the member for Beaches–East York, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Dave Levac: There's another one, isn't there?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize. The member for Brant.

Mr. Dave Levac: I just wanted to take an opportunity to speak directly to the member of Beaches–East York. He has consistently been very level-headed when it comes to pointing out the good parts and the bad parts. That's his job, and he says it that way. And I appreciate that very much.

I was very interested in his comments about expanding beyond. There are two pieces that I wanted to make sure he was aware of, and if he can acknowledge that, then maybe he will give us the negative side, of course. First, in the budget that's been presented to us, there is procurement legislation being proposed that indicates exactly what he's talking about in terms of "buy Ontario." It's called Buy Ontario, and it indicates that the province has designated that there would be proposed legislation to deal with the points he's actually making right now about whether or not procurement would be Ontario-made, and it's called Buy Ontario. I'm sure he can recognize that that's on the radar screen, and I'm glad he brought it up.

The second one is extending GO service and the transit concepts outside the areas designated in this particular legislation. He is aware that in Places to Grow he will notice that there's a 30-year build-out inside that piece of legislation, along with working with the Minister of Transportation in a 30-year build-out plan that would do the connect he's talking about. I fully support what he's talking about. I would be remiss if I didn't mention that I'm looking even beyond Hamilton, and I'm sure the member sitting beside you is aware of that. We are looking for extensions beyond simply the GTA into Hamilton, and Hamilton has been mentioned as the next connect to GO service and improvements in GO service. I'm hoping that we extend that into the riding of Brant, which is what we're working on, and to form a loop in the transportation corridors we're talking about: Niagara,

Brant, Cambridge, Kitchener-Waterloo, Barrie, Hamilton and the GTA, which I believe will address what he's talking about. I'm sure he understands that's a massive plan that takes time to accomplish.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We'll return to the member for Beaches–East York, who has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'd like to thank the members from Peterborough, Durham, Davenport and Brant for their comments and questions, and I'll try to respond to them as best I can.

The member from Peterborough talked about his own municipality, and I thank him for the comments on Peterborough and what is happening in Peterborough. I tried to include Peterborough in my comments, because I do believe that what is happening and what was announced yesterday in Toronto needs to be emulated throughout the province, and that smaller cities need to have the same kind of experience, the same kind of electrification, the same kind of transit programs to get people out of their cars.

The member from Durham made the very strange statement that Mr. Giambrone was a policy adviser for the NDP. I have been here for seven and a half years and I have known Mr. Giambrone even longer than that, and I want to assure the member from Durham that Mr. Giambrone never worked here—never once. I know he is a New Democrat, and I know he did hold federal office within the administration, but he has been a councillor now for two terms and is a very level-headed one on a council that does not have party politics.

I'm very puzzled by what the member from Davenport had to say. He wants me to be more positive, and he doesn't want me to hold up a bill. It is not my intention to hold up any bill. It is not the intention of the NDP to hold up any bill. It is the job of opposition to point out things in a bill that may not be exactly right. It is our job to point out some faults.

I started by commending the government for the announcement yesterday. I talked about the rationale and the reason and the jobs that are going to be created, and I am supportive of that. My job is to tell you, and where I was getting toward the end is that I believe it is important to keep elected representatives on the board of Metrolinx. I do not think it is the right policy for this government to take them off, because it will drive it into secrecy and that's the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Almost inadvertently, I hope I was an example of the kind of behaviour that this particular bill is intended to foster and to provide an incentive for.

This morning I got up at my usual time of just shortly after 6 and dashed out of the house at 7:28. Here's how I got to work this morning: I have to pick up the 41A East at the corner of Churchill Meadows and Tacc and I have to pay for that with a 60-cent-cash fare and show them my GO train pass with an uncanceled ticket. That's one

method of transit and one method of paying for it. That takes me to the Streetsville GO train station. I cancel my GO train 10-ride pass, and I take it down to Union Station. So those are two methods of transportation operated by two companies, paid for in two different ways. At Union Station, I walk over and I get on the TTC and I take it to Queen's Park, then walk through the tunnel and I'm here. So that is the third method of transportation, operated by the third independent company which I've had to pay for—in this case using a token—just to get here.

This area, here in the greater Toronto area, has just about overtaken Chicago as the third-largest metropolitan area in North America. The largest is New York, the second-largest is Los Angeles and now the third-largest is here in the greater Toronto area. We have got to be able to do better to enable people to get from where they live to where they work, to where they study, to where they want to go for entertainment.

This bill is part of a whole series of initiatives—some of which I'm going to discuss in my 20 minutes—that enable Ontarians to do something sensible and not have to drive their cars everywhere they go. God bless; we all love our cars. Indeed, there's nothing wrong with having your car, but do you have to take your car everywhere you go? Our job as legislators is to provide a framework and the resources to enable people to have the kind of public transit they need, the kind of transit that people see when they travel abroad.

I'll use the example of two that I've seen. One is Washington, DC, where transit goes pretty much everywhere. Washington, DC, started from way behind Toronto. Toronto had a subway when Washington was car city. Another place that I was at earlier in this decade was Hong Kong. Hong Kong is roughly the equivalent of taking the entire population of the GTA and moving it into one neighbourhood. Hong Kong is dense, and for public transit, density is everything. This is something that our province was also late in learning. If we want to have cost-effective, efficient, workable public transit, then one of the things that we need is density, and that's what the Places to Grow legislation has helped us do.

In Hong Kong, when you get off the plane at the airport, you don't have to leave the terminal to get on the train that connects you with Central in Hong Kong, which is, as the name suggests, the centre of the city. You're there.

When I get on the 41A East in Mississauga, I see my fellow sleepy, bleary-eyed commuters, and I can recall that on one occasion a gentleman came up to me and he said, "Good morning. How are you?"—a little bit of chit-chat. He said to me just before I got off the bus, "It's really good to see our MPP taking the bus with us. It inspires us." I found, personally, that was very flattering, and if that's all I have to do, I'm pleased to do that. Besides, on those days that I don't have to take my car, that's an awful lot less stress on me and on every other commuter who has the luxury of not having to drive.

As well, and I'm speaking personally as a legislator, I have an opportunity on the train in the morning to do a

little focus group, to have people sit down and talk to me about whatever is on their minds, and that's something that's very precious to me as a legislator. I get a chance to hear people's thoughts.

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In the course of listening to people, I find that they like the things the province of Ontario has been doing in public transit. I'd like to talk about those things, in addition to mentioning some of the announcements just yesterday—the some \$7.2 billion to build two new light rail transit lines along Eglinton and Finch Avenue, and, of course, to upgrade the existing Scarborough rapid transit line. I'll come back to that a little bit later.

Some of the initiatives that the province of Ontario has taken in recent years have really made a difference in our neighbourhoods of western Mississauga. Let me just go over a few of them. We can all remember—or at least those of us who are over 30, I think—when inside every bus and every subway car and every GO bus and every GO train there was a sign that said, "The operation of this transit service is financially assisted by the government of Ontario." Then one day during the mid-1990s, all those signs disappeared, because for a period of years, the province of Ontario got out of the public transit business, and our roads became more and more choked with traffic.

Now the province of Ontario is back assisting public transit, doing for people here what nations across the world do to enable their people to, as I said earlier, get from where they live to where they work to where they study to where they want to go for entertainment.

We have to use public transit, and we have to marshal our resources to minimize the number of cars on our roads. Let me talk about the story of that as it applies on the Milton GO line, which serves our neighbourhoods in western Mississauga—neighbourhoods like Lisgar, Meadowvale, Streetsville, western Erin Mills and Churchill Meadows. Lisgar was the first new station to be built in the city of Mississauga in 25 years. It got started when, frankly, I began to petition the Minister of Transportation in this House and we read petitions here for more than a year. In January, a very cold day in January, the Minister of Transportation and I announced our government's intention to provide funds to GO Transit to build a new station at Lisgar to serve a very dense neighbourhood in northwest Mississauga. At a stroke, that station would help get traffic off roads like Derry Road, Aquitaine, Britannia, Battleford—all of those roads that head east in the morning. A lot of that traffic, instead of clogging those roads going this way, could go up north to Lisgar.

In point of fact, many days when I'm taking the train, I drive my car up and park it at Lisgar—a brand new station. Why do I do that? Because, among other things, while parking is very difficult to find at many GO train stations in Mississauga, you can park at Lisgar. For those who live in those neighbourhoods of Meadowvale and Lisgar and Churchill Meadows, here's a great secret from one of your MPPs: If you want to park, you can get a parking spot at Lisgar. It won't last forever, but right at the moment, it's still easy to park at Lisgar.

Construction got going in late 2006—again, on a bitterly cold day—when then-Minister of Transportation Donna Cansfield joined with our local city councillors and we turned the sod. That project proceeded very, very well. It was finished nine weeks ahead of schedule. It opened in early September 2007, and it was completed under budget. Part of the reason for that is the effective way that the city of Mississauga and the government of Ontario worked together.

It's not like the project didn't have a few bumps in the road; it certainly did, but anytime anything went wrong, our local councillor worked with me—and I can't say enough about her: Pat Saito, the councillor for ward 9 in Mississauga. Pat and I talked about Lisgar often. Anytime anything went wrong, if she didn't solve it on her end, I was able to solve it on my end, and as the guys in the construction shack told us, "Nothing happened to derail this project, and anytime anything did, you guys fixed it." So we had our GO train station nine weeks early, in the fall of 2007.

Construction on the station is now complete and, as I speak in this month of April 2009, there is a brand new windmill that's going to generate just about all of the electricity for the station, when the wind is blowing, and be able to make a contribution for the grid. That windmill is pretty much complete. They're just synchronizing it and doing the testing before they connect it up and enable it to power Lisgar and to make a contribution for the grid.

As well, when the Lisgar station was built, it was designed from the very outset to accommodate 12-car-long trains—12-car-long trains that at the time the station was built weren't then running on the GO line, but we knew they were coming and they were designed in from the very start. These days on the Milton line, all of the trains pull 12 cars. The station was designed from the very outset to assume that there was going to be a third track on the Milton line—a third track that was announced in July 2007 as part of Ontario's Move 2020 plan. So Lisgar is completely ready.

Let's talk about some of the work on the other GO train stations on the Milton line. At Meadowvale, near where I lived for about 11 years, the platform has been extended to accommodate those 12-car trains. When Meadowvale was built in the early 1980s, at a time when interest rates were peaking at some 20%, they cut every corner they could in construction. So finally, years later, we have proper disabled access to get from the station on to the platform; there's a brand new elevator, a brand new tunnel; there are more platform shelters; they've resurfaced the area. There's a general station upgrade at Meadowvale so at least the experience of taking the train at Meadowvale has been substantially enhanced in recent years.

At Streetsville, in 2003, when I was knocking on doors and asking for people's support in my first election, one of the things that several of the residents mentioned—and then I started to talk about it and more residents mentioned it—was the length of the parking lot and the fact that you've got a long walk if you're on the

last three trains—to park your car, to walk literally about a city block to get up to the station, to buy your fare, cancel your ticket, to go under the tunnel, to get on the platform, to walk part of the way back to get on the train. The good part about that is, it keeps you in shape. The flip side of that is it's a pretty miserable walk when you're walking into the teeth of a blizzard or into driving rain. So I spoke with the people from GO Transit. They sent out the traffic engineers and they said, "You know, you're right. We can do this for the people of Streetsville. We can put in a new access tunnel." Work on that tunnel began in July 2008; it's nearing completion. So for those of us who occasionally drive our cars and park them at Streetsville, if you're on the last three trains and you're parking near the back of the lot, you're going to have a much shorter walk. They're not going to be selling tickets at the access tunnel, but if you've got a monthly pass or a 10-ride ticket or a two-ride ticket, you can cancel your ticket, go underneath the tunnel and get on the train and skip an awful lot of that long walk—a real progressive move for GO Transit. I really thank them for their co-operation.

Among the other things that are in the process of happening or are substantially completed at Streetsville, the old bricks that over the decades had heaved and cracked and were notorious for puddles when it was raining and really slick ice when it was cold have all been taken up and they've been replaced with new concrete. The station has received a general upgrade. You can now buy a cup of coffee there.

in Streetsville, Meadowvale and Lisgar—to my good friend at the Toronto Star, Jim Coyle, who was wondering out loud in print about a week ago about what difference a government member who is not a cabinet minister can make, I can point to those three projects, as well as to the extension of Credit Valley Hospital, and say that those are projects that, as a member, I worked on and those are projects that are under way today in part because our government listened to the people of the city. That's some of the difference that an individual member can make.

One of the other projects that GO Transit has been very effective with has been the brand new bus garage and repair facility in Streetsville. It opened just this past winter, provided 180 new jobs—this was about a \$50-million project—and one of the features about the bus garage is its green footprint. This is a facility that is energy-efficient to the limit of the way technology can do it today. This enables a lot of the GO buses that serve our northwest neighbourhoods to basically come home to go to sleep close to where they're going to start in the morning, to be able to be washed and repaired close to where they operate, and to minimize the amount of deadheading of an empty bus driving on roads and taking up traffic space. It's a very attractive facility and, frankly, is a major enhancement to the neighbourhood.

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On the other stations on the Milton line, Erindale and Cooksville are in the middle of major expansions of their

parking capacity. For those residents who live in those neighbourhoods, this is going to mean that if you want to connect to the GO train and take it downtown, you can connect close to where you live, and the shortage of parking will soon be alleviated.

I'd like to talk about two more things in my remaining time. One is the capacity expansion, given the limitations that we do have. I mentioned earlier that the trains on the Milton line are now all 12 cars long. The Milton line was the first place that GO Transit deployed its new locomotives, which I think are called the MP40 series, that are powerful enough to haul 12 loaded passenger cars. By increasing those trains from 10 to 12 cars, we immediately increased the capacity of each train by 20%—and GO has recently announced one new train on the Milton line, one in the morning and another one in the afternoon, so we're going to increase the capacity by another 16% on those crowded trains with one new train.

The other one I want to mention in my remaining time is the third track on the Milton line. In the Kinsmen Centre in Streetsville, there's an aerial picture of Mississauga taken in July 1950, looking northwest. Running right down the centre of that are two rail lines. There were probably two rail lines for decades before that. Today, there are just two rail lines that connect Milton to Toronto down through the Milton corridor. There has been a lot of growth since then. We have got to make the pie larger in order to be able to provide more reliable GO train service two ways. As it is, the trains only go east in the morning and only come west in the afternoon. We need two-way GO train service to help more people get out of their cars and take the train to and from work, whether they're going or coming in the middle of the day.

The line is owned by CP Rail, and CP Rail uses that line for freight purposes, for all intents and purposes, at 100% of its capacity. Those big freight trains are now upwards of a kilometre or two kilometres long as they rumble past. So to make that pie larger, we have to build a third track to enable two-way GO train service.

I've spoken to GO Transit about that for a number of years. GO Transit had the first level of environmental assessment in the fall of 2006. In 2007-08, they did the full-blown environmental assessment, which, not surprisingly, has shown that there are no insurmountable problems in adding a third track to the Milton GO line. The engineering study to lead to the drafting of tender documents to go to request for proposals will be done, I am told, this year. That would mean that as early as next year—and we do hope it will be next year—GO Transit can issue that request for proposals and hope to get a good, competitive winning tender. It's about a three-year build-out from the time the shovel goes in the ground until the time the third track is complete and we can put more trains on the line, and we can have all-day train service helping people who live in those Mississauga neighbourhoods of Meadowvale, Streetsville, Lisgar, Churchill Meadows, central Erin Mills, Cooksville, Dixie and so on and so forth to get to and from Toronto.

This has all been a part of projects such as what was announced yesterday. In doing my summary of the work on the Milton GO line, I've also left out the expansion of the Lakeshore line, where a third track will be added to greatly enhance the ability of commuters in Clarkson and Port Credit to get to and from downtown. These are just a small part of our government's efforts to work for the benefit of Ontario to enable people to commute more efficiently.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Mississauga—Streetsville did give us a fairly decent itinerary of how he gets to work, but there was little content in his remarks on Bill 163, dealing with the governance of Metrolinx, as well as the question, "Where's the money?" We see the money announced this morning; we saw the same money announced in 2007. It's 2009, and we've just had a budget. I'm concerned that this Move Ontario plan, the MoveOntario 2020 plan that was part of their election scheme in 2007, is part of a grander scheme of not being straightforward with the people of Ontario.

I am looking forward to a more critical assessment of Bill 163 by the member from Newmarket—Aurora, Mr. Klees. Mr. Klees did serve as the Minister of Transportation. He's also one of the highly respected members who will be seeking the leadership of the Conservative Party, which I think would be quite threatening to the current McGuinty government.

That being said, the member from Streetsville talked about his particular application to the minister. I think it could be considered a conflict of interest that he is improving his own conditions. I can understand looking after constituents, but it sounds to me like you're taking credit for the tunnel being dug. I'd like to see where that money has been allocated. If it had anything to do with you, I think you should be dealing with the Integrity Commissioner.

I would sooner deal with the lack of service in Durham. When you start to talk about the east-west spine, Durham region—the regional transit in Durham—is working hard, but they're being ignored by the government. In fact, I cited that earlier today in quotes from the paper by Roger Anderson as well as the director of transportation for the region.

The member from Mississauga—Streetsville means well, and I think he should consider his investments—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I also would echo some of the member's concerns. The member from Mississauga is doing his job. He's trying to represent his people the best way he can, and I commend him for that. However, I must inform him that Ontario doesn't end in Mississauga and Streetsville. It's not all about that area. The member from Brant and I can attest to the needs of Hamilton and Brantford. I know he's doing his thing for his people and is doing a good job; however, he's forgetting about the rest of us.

We need some major, major transitions in Hamilton: one from the James Street train station to the airport—they're trying to expand Hamilton airport to expand commerce and transport in Ontario. And we also need a B line, which I hear is going ahead—we're in the top five under consideration. But I can't emphasize enough that the member has to look at the big picture. It's not all about one area and the needs of one area. Ontario is a big place.

Also there is another side to Ontario, across that Skyway Bridge, that is not getting its fair shake when it comes to transit or light rail or the things we need. Hamilton has been overlooked for years. We're one of the largest cities in Ontario, and we've been overlooked many, many times. There is a little bit—a tidbit—of the billions of dollars that are coming to Hamilton. Not enough, not fast enough. We need consideration west of the Skyway Bridge.

I hope that, in deliberations with his caucus, this member and the rest of the members will consider a good portion of Ontario that is being ignored.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I want to congratulate the member from Mississauga—Streetsville. Some of the comments that were made by the member from Durham with regard to the comments of the member from Mississauga—Streetsville—he talked about riding public transit, he talked about the planning, he talked about the impact on his community, he talked about the regional aspect of it. Then the member stands up and criticizes that.

Don't just take the word of the member from Mississauga—Streetsville on it; let's hear what the mayor of Mississauga has to say about this important piece of legislation. "I'm very pleased with it," said Hazel McCallion, mayor of Mississauga, when asked what she thinks of the proposed legislation.

"First of all, Metrolinx was delayed more than a year because of controversies between municipalities as to how many elected people should be on the board. I think an independent board overseeing all of the systems is important for resolving these kinds of disputes. There needs to be more than the regional systems, so I'm delighted."

When we hear the concerns of the members from across the way, we understand that a regional system is a system that looks to the future of what we need for transit to move people around. That is certainly how we've moved forward with growth patterns and how we have made significant investments in infrastructure.

I just wanted to set the record straight with regard to the gas tax after a comment made by the member from Durham region, just to let him know that in fact Huron—Bruce does receive funding from the gas tax. We don't have GO Transit, we don't have subway links, but what we do have are buses moving around, albeit limited, but we do what we can. And this is the first time the provincial government has come to the table.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to enter the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): You've already had one. You can't.

Member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: To comment on the member from Mississauga—Streetsville, I always enjoy listening to him. He is articulate. He brings home his riding to this Legislature. He lets us know what is happening in Mississauga, particularly in Mississauga—Streetsville. But I was hoping to have heard some more from a government member, especially one who is so articulate, because Bill 163 talks about a lot more than just what is happening in any particular area. I know that I perhaps dwelt a little long on what was happening in Toronto, but that is an agglomeration of 22 or 23 ridings, and it impacts the ridings outside of it as well, with moving people around.

I was hoping he would have talked—and he should have talked—about the structure of what is being set up in Metrolinx and how that will improve or not improve the structure that exists today.

I was hoping he would have talked about public participation on the new board—because oftentimes boards that do not contain public figures tend to be closed boards—and whether or not he thought that a closed-board system was better than what was taking place at the present time.

I was hoping he would have talked about the transparency, whether or not this new Metrolinx is going to have public meetings and public records and people will be able to come and listen, or at least see the minutes.

I was hoping he was going to talk about the ownership of assets—because right now the assets are primarily contained and owned by the respective municipalities, Toronto having the largest assets, but Mississauga also having a fair amount of assets of public vehicles and a public vehicle system—and who will own the assets in the future, whether or not the municipalities will have to give them up; and, last but not least, the local plans for transit. Maybe he can address those in the two—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. I'll return to the member from Mississauga—Streetsville to respond.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I want to thank the members for Durham, Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Huron—Bruce and Beaches—East York for their comments.

To the member for Durham: Mayor McCallion, as the member for Huron—Bruce has pointed out, supports the new governance model. The Milton line is a perfect example of how a promise made is in fact a project delivered and a real success.

With regard to his comments on the Streetsville upgrades and the access tunnel, I do take part of the credit for that. I say to the member for Durham: If you have a problem with that, shame on you.

To the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, I thank him for acknowledging our success. One of the things that we need is those rail upgrades on the Lakeshore line to better serve not only Hamilton but the Niagara Peninsula. So I thank you for the comments; you're absolutely right. Those things that we need are the things that are going to be required to get rail service going between Hamilton and Metro Toronto, because you can't just fly over Mississauga; you have to go through Mississauga.

The member for Huron–Bruce has pointed out that if we don't have the infrastructure, then, for example, we cannot expand the Milton line, which is already running at capacity, to Cambridge and beyond. We can't better serve the rapidly growing neighbourhoods in Milton unless we expand capacity on the Milton line.

I thank the member for Beaches–East York as well. Just to make something very clear on it, the Milton line impacts some 12 or 14 different ridings. If we don't improve the infrastructure on the Milton line, we can't properly service a big chunk of Metro Toronto that depends on the Milton line. So I thank you very much for pointing out how Bill 163, through its application on the Milton line, is going to make a difference for the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to participate in this debate. As I indicated in my response to the minister's statement when he tabled this legislation, I will speak in favour of the legislation and support it.

What is interesting is how long it took this government to realize that the governance model that they have had in place simply would not achieve the objective of a truly coordinated transportation and transit system for the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. The reason for that, I think, is predictable. We can't blame elected officials for advocating for their particular region or their particular priorities. In fact, that is what they get elected to do.

I represent one of the fastest-growing regions in this province, perhaps even in the country, York region, so the issue of transit and transportation is always top of mind. The issue of gridlock and its impact on the economy and on the quality of life in our communities is a major one. Since being elected in 1995, I've identified the issue of gridlock as one of the top three priority issues that governments should be addressing. Unfortunately, it hasn't been within the top three priorities either of this government or, unfortunately, the previous government of which I was part. I believe it was a grave error, because transportation, transit, the ability to move throughout our communities, is critical not only to the quality of life of individuals but to our economy as well. It really should be seen as fundamental, and it should be a priority in the decision-making of any government, and that's why I recommend it.

In fact, as Minister of Transportation, my recommendation was that we would move to a regional system. From the very outset, it was my opinion that any board

overseeing a regional authority would consist not of elected officials, but would have individuals responsible for decision-making who are experts in the field of transit and transportation planning and land use so that there isn't a conflict in terms of political override of what the appropriate plan for transportation and transit should look like. It shouldn't be whether I think the priority is for my particular community. There's a responsibility that we ensure that we have an interconnected, congruous transportation and transit system that in fact serves the greater area, and that it is also then constructed in the most efficient way and in an accountable way so that all who are contributing to its cost will not only know that it's being done efficiently but will also be assured that there is value for the tax dollars that are being invested.

1010

The first comment that I made to the minister when I saw this new act was that I welcome this governance model. When the previous bill was introduced in this House, I criticized the legislation at that time because the governance model was not right. Unfortunately, it took this government considerable time to come to that realization, and we've wasted a lot of time as a result of that. With every day that goes by that we don't take action on a substantive policy, we lose the opportunity to regain some of that lost time. However, here we are.

The one thing that I will say, though, is that I don't understand why this government continues to do business the way it does. One of the questions that I asked during the briefing that we had was, were the municipalities consulted before this plan was proposed? The response that I got was that Metrolinx was consulted, but municipalities were not. I think that municipalities have to be wondering why this government chose not to consult with them prior to taking this very significant step that essentially, in one way, closes municipalities out of the loop. I'm not saying that they should have compromised on the governance model, and I hear the third party saying that they want to introduce amendments that will bring elected officials back into the governance model. I want to be very straight with the member who's proposing this, Mr. Prue. I certainly will not support that amendment, because I think it's been too long coming to give us what we have before us now, and I have a feeling that the government won't support that amendment either. But having said that, I do think that with regard to any legislation that's introduced in this House that affects our municipal partners, the right thing to do is to bring them into consultation early on in the deliberations. I think that simply shows respect for our partners.

What I want to address here is the issue of—I want to raise a caution, because one of the important steps taken in this legislation is to give this new agency, Metrolinx—which combines GO Transit with Metrolinx—the authority to own new transit infrastructure. That sounds reasonable, because the justification is that we're going to place the ownership into this agency, which is then controlled by the provincial government, which allows, then, for the provincial government to deal with the funding issues in

a more efficient way—and that, again, makes good sense. My caution goes to the transparency and the accountability measures that are put in place to ensure the appropriate accountability by Metrolinx to the provincial government.

We have an example that I'm reviewing now that actually came to my attention just a couple of weeks ago within York region, where its transit authority appears to have the authority not only to own infrastructure that relates to transit—stations, buses and so on—but it also appears to transfer the authority to own property that would then be developed for purposes other than transit. It may be justifiably related in some stretch of the definition, but essentially what it would do is give that authority the right to own property for the purposes of developing commercial property and even residential property.

I don't believe that is the role, nor should it be the role, of a transit authority. That's the role of the private sector. If there will be expropriations of land for the purpose of facilitating transit or transportation or rights of way, then there should be a very specific framework of responsibility. It should be well defined what this agency can and cannot do with that property. The last thing that we want is for Metrolinx, or any other transit authority, for that matter, to on the one hand have the authority, the power and the support of the provincial government to expropriate lands and then to take it upon itself to actually develop those lands for purposes other than directly related to transit. I don't think that's appropriate and I believe that in the final analysis we have to put some specific guidelines in place to ensure that.

I see, Speaker, that you're giving me notice that my time is up. I have much more to say on that, but I have to defer to you, sir, as the Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to observe the rules of the House and the standing orders. As such, this House stands in recess until 10:30, when we'll reconvene for question period.

The House recessed from 1017 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'd like to welcome Patricia Pepper in the assembly today: a dedicated volunteer from the great city of Ottawa.

Hon. George Smitherman: Today in the galleries and here at the Legislature are several hundred women from the Ontario Women's Liberal Commission, and in particular, I hope that members of the assembly might join me in welcoming the member of Parliament for Scarborough Southwest, Michelle Simson, and Liana Turrin, the president of the Ontario Women's Liberal Commission, and all others who have come to the Legislature today.

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais reconnaître plusieurs jeunes qui font partie du Parlement jeunesse et qui sont

ici avec nous aujourd'hui. Je commence avec Kamal Alem, qui est de Sudbury; ensuite, Justin Bélanger, qui est de Timmins–Baie James; Mélanie Dufresne, également de Timmins; Mireille Lemieux, Rémi Nolet et Brandon Garnett, qui sont tous du comté de Timmins–Baie James; Jessie Turcotte; Justin Morin-Carpentier; Chantal Renaud, qui est de Nickel Belt; Kevin Dumoulin; Courtney Tresidder; Carla DeCeccio; Alexire Morier; William Stuckless; et Vincent Bergeron, qui font tous partie du Parlement jeunesse francophone. Ce sont des jeunes du nord. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Il me fait plaisir de souhaiter la bienvenue aux élèves de 41 écoles secondaires francophones de l'Ontario. Ces élèves, qui représentent les écoles de leur région, participent aux troisième Parlement jeunesse francophone, qui se déroule ici même à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario.

Merci au personnel enseignant qui les accompagne. Bienvenue à Queen's Park et bon succès dans vos délibérations.

I would like also to mention that there are 11 students from my own riding who are part of the group today.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I would like to introduce two students who are here with us today. Jessie Turcotte, from École secondaire l'Orée des Bois à Dubreuilville, is a student at this brand new school that we were most proud to open late last year. She travelled on her first airplane to get down here today. Her teacher is Gabrielle Lemieux. And from Elliot Lake, Justin Morin-Carpentier, who attends Villa française des Jeunes. It's Justin's second visit here.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Today being World Autism Day, I would like to ask for unanimous consent for everybody to be allowed to wear the bracelet that represents autism.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Rick Johnson: I'd like to welcome two very good friends in the east gallery this morning, Niki Worton and Cathy Caissie, from my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I have several guests from Ajax–Pickering, but I would certainly like to focus on one lady in the east members' gallery. I am related to her through marriage. I'd like to introduce my wife to the Legislature this morning.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: As I'm unable to be here this afternoon and I believe some members of my riding will be here, I want to welcome them in advance: Tom, Pam, Kayla and Debbie Hawkins, who are family to the family who unfortunately passed away due to carbon monoxide poisoning and who will be here this afternoon for the private member's bill. I'm really pleased that they'll be able to be here for that today.

Mr. John Yakubuski: I'd like to welcome, from my riding, Chloée Godin-Jacques, who is in the Speaker's gallery today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Scarborough Southwest and page Olivia

Peters, I'd like to welcome her mother, Irene Makeeff Peters; her brother, Nicholas Peters; her grandmother, Lydia Makeeff; her uncle, Winston Shantora; and her aunt, Nadia Shantora, sitting today in the Speaker's gallery. Welcome. A special welcome to my nephew, Nick.

As well, on behalf of the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services and page Jackson Amos, I would like to welcome his mother, Linda Amos, and his sister, Elizabeth Amos, sitting today in the east members' gallery.

Also, we'd like to acknowledge in the Speaker's gallery Mr. Gilles Morin, the member for Carleton East in the 33rd, 34th, 35th and 36th Parliaments, and also a former Deputy Speaker. Welcome back, Gilles.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Eglinton—Lawrence is out of order.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Minister of Health. Electronic health records will improve patient access to care and patient safety. By the Minister of Health's own admission to a group of nurses on January 22, 2009, he said, "Ontario really lags behind other jurisdictions and provinces in developing electronic health services." One has to question why that is the case when this Premier has poured over half a billion taxpayer dollars into the Smart Systems for Health Agency.

Minister, in your opinion, is pouring more than \$600 million into a now defunct agency a prudent and caring thing to do during such challenging economic times?

Hon. David Caplan: The member well knows the Smart Systems for Health Agency. I believe she was the one who had set it up. I do think it's a fair characterization. While they did much good work, they did not achieve the goal in the mandate which they were set. That is why, upon becoming Minister of Health, I set about creating eHealth Ontario. I think that in eHealth Ontario we have the individuals and the expertise which are going to be necessary to be able to transform Ontario's electronic health infrastructure to be what it should be. In fact, we've been able to attract on the board David Livingston, president and CEO of Infrastructure Ontario; Matthew Anderson, CEO of the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network; Heather Sherrard, vice-president of clinical services at the University of Ottawa Heart Institute, and many, many others. I believe these individuals, along with its chair, Alan Hudson, will make wise use of the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: After sinking more than 600 million taxpayer dollars into Smart Systems for Health, the Premier decided to abolish it and set up another agency. He did so, by the way, very quietly.

Minister, the fact that this organization was abolished is a clear admission that it was an utterly failed program on your part. The fact that not one board member of the former agency is now part of the new agency shows an utter failure on your part. In the Ministry of Health results plan briefing book, it says, "Ontarians are entitled to know what they are getting for their money." I agree. Minister, will you today call in the Auditor General to do a value-for-money audit of the agency?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact the Auditor General, as an independent officer of this Legislature, is available to be able to, if he believes, provide any analysis, but I can tell the member that I have tremendous confidence in Dr. Hudson and in Sarah Kramer, the new president and CEO, to be able to transform Ontario's electronic health infrastructure.

I've instructed them to begin with a diabetes registry. The next product that I believe is going to be critical is an e-prescribing regime that will link Ontario physicians with pharmacists, and we'll be able to cut down on adverse events and errors. The third one, of course, which is critical to us and which we are absolutely determined to see put into place, is an electronic health record for all Ontarians.

In fact, we've celebrated 10 years of the Electronic Child Health Network, where they have provided a fabulous template, and that is a good example of some of the work that has been done previously.

I can assure this member that I have placed at my—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

1040

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: It's obvious that this minister does not want to talk about Smart Systems for Health. He is totally disregarding the right of the public to know how this \$647 million was spent—this at a time when this government has demonstrated runaway spending and mismanagement of millions and millions of dollars.

I say to you today: Minister, are you willing to direct the Auditor General to commence a value-for-money audit of the Smart Systems for Health Agency, or are you going to continue to show your disregard and disdain for the taxpayers in this province?

Hon. David Caplan: I disagree with the rhetoric and nonsense of the member opposite. Quite frankly, she set up an agency which didn't fulfill its mandate. That's why I came along, along with my predecessor, to be able to re-form this agency, eHealth Ontario, with, I believe, the board and the personnel in place to be able to fulfill a very important function of an e-health infrastructure. I believe they are on the right track.

I would also mention to the member opposite that we're working very closely with our federal counterparts—they, in their recent budget, also recapitalized Canada Health Infoway to the tune of half a billion dollars. I expect that Ontario will be receiving its appropriate and fair share of those funds to be able to invest in important electronic health infrastructure that Ontarians would expect would fuel the revolution in health care.

The 2008 budget committed \$47 million, and in the most recent budget brought down—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: It's apparent that the Minister of Health and the Premier have something to hide, and they're avoiding calling in the Auditor General.

We found some information through a freedom-of-information inquiry. We found some secrets that you would like to bury under the bushes. Despite no results, let me quote some of the spending that you allowed from 2003 to 2008. In 2003, the agency had \$24,000 in travel expenses; in 2008, that number had skyrocketed to nearly \$430,000. Food expenses in 2008: \$85,000. The list goes on and on.

Minister, why do you want to hide this information from taxpayers?

Hon. David Caplan: The member's question belies her charge in this Legislature. In fact, all of the information is presented in public accounts, which I assume is where the member was able to obtain the information.

In fact, it had not been the case when that member had the privilege to sit on your right hand that such information was easily made available to this Legislature and to the public. I would suggest that that is a significant contrast between her actions and the actions of this government. This government believes in transparency. This government believes in accountability. This government believes in expanding the powers of the Provincial Auditor to go in and take a look at the various agencies, boards and commissions right across the province of Ontario.

That member has opposed those actions, and that member has opposed accountability and transparency. I'll take no such lectures from the member, given such a sorry track record as we've seen in the past. Our record on electronic health in fact is to correct her errors and see—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I gather from the minister's response that he's either in complete denial or—just as unacceptable, and I sometimes feel that might be the case—he really doesn't really know what's going on at his ministry.

Let me point out some other examples of the entitlement atmosphere of this government. The agency was disbanded by the Premier and given a new name and a new CEO. So what happened? The new CEO spent \$24,000 on new furniture, \$17,000 on office renovations, over \$1,000 on artwork and over \$1,000 on blinds and window dressings. This is one office where this government spent nearly \$50,000. That's more than most Ontarians make in a year.

Minister, how can you find that acceptable and why are you trying to hide the facts from the public? Why will you not ask the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. David Caplan: Nothing could be further from the truth. All of this information is public through, first of all, estimates and then through public accounts.

I can tell you that I and the government have directed Infrastructure Ontario to identify and examine new and innovative alternative finance and procurement models that can be used to successfully deliver health information technology projects. For example, the diabetes registry will help 900,000 people living with diabetes be able to manage their care by providing them with up-to-date information and educational tools electronically. Its purpose is to reduce the gap between recommended guidelines and the care Ontarians receive by providing clinicians with reminders and reports; by linking those allied health professionals—physicians, nurses, dietitians, physiotherapists and pharmacists and many, many others—with the patients to be able to manage their conditions. I believe we have the right individuals in the right place with the right mandate to revolutionize—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: It's obvious the minister doesn't want to talk about Smart Systems for Health, and with good reason. This government is not going to achieve until 2015 what other provinces are going to achieve in 2010. The taxpayers have a right to know that the money that is being set aside by this government is going to be well spent, because we have six more years where you have the opportunity to squander their money. And you've already done so: You've wasted \$647 million.

So I ask you today one more time: Will you call in the Auditor General to do a value-for-money audit of this agency, or will you continue to hide the truth from the taxpayers?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I don't need the honourable member's—withdraw the comment, please.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I will.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister.

Hon. David Caplan: Nothing could be further from the truth. The member knows that all of the information is available to the public through estimates and through public accounts. The member equivocates when it comes to these matters. She in fact was the one who set up the Smart Systems for Health Agency. It was the actions of myself and this government which have eliminated or quashed Smart Systems for Health and formed eHealth Ontario. As I've said, Dr. Alan Hudson is its chair, and Sarah Kramer, formerly at Cancer Care Ontario, is its current president and CEO. I believe these individuals have the ability, the acumen and the dedication to be able to implement a very aggressive and important program, which unfortunately was not started under a previous government. We will reach our goal of a diabetes registry. We will reach our goal of e-prescribing. We will reach our goal of an electronic health record for all Ontarians. This member offers no constructive suggestion—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. The average Ontario family spends \$4,174 on basics like gas for the car, home heating and electricity. An 8% tax hike is going to cost them an extra \$330 on those basics alone. When families are worried about job loss and fewer work hours that are available to them in this economic situation, why are the McGuinty Liberals hitting them with an 8% tax hike?

Hon. George Smitherman: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would remind the leader of the third party that in fact Ontario families can expect a \$10.6-billion cut in personal taxes, much of that accruing to low-income families. I would remind the member opposite that Ontario is creating the largest sales tax credit in the country. That will help Ontarians of modest income. We are increasing the Ontario child benefit to \$1,100. The NDP vote and speak against that. That kind of initiative, sir—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): You may want to be in your seat.
Minister.

1050

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The members of the NDP voted against every one of those initiatives.

Finally, I'd remind the leader of the third party that she and her predecessor signed a letter to this government, inviting us—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): No, don't stop the clock. I'd just remind the member from Hamilton East that if he's going to be making any interjections, he would probably be best sitting in his own seat.

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The average household spends about \$7,700 on purchases that will be hit with an 8% tax hike. That is the fact. That includes everything from gas to the Internet bill to magazines to haircuts. The tax hike means more than \$580 a year extra in taxes. It will be thousands more if you buy a house or if you have the misfortune of having to bury a loved one and pay for the funeral.

Why are the McGuinty Liberals taking more than \$580 out of the average family budget when people are losing their jobs?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, 93% of Ontarians will see their overall tax burden decrease because of this government.

I'd say to the leader of the third party: Why is it that your party very recently called upon us to increase the provincial sales tax? You didn't ask us to increase the child benefit; in fact, you voted against that. You didn't ask us to cut personal taxes for the lowest bracket in Canada to give our people of modest incomes the lowest tax rates.

Why did you want us to increase the provincial sales tax without any of that? That party and its leader don't

understand the importance of cutting personal taxes at this time. They don't understand the importance of the Ontario child benefit. This government, this party and our Premier certainly do.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Horwath: Again, I'm asking questions to this minister about his tax policy. We've actually used this government's own online calculator to compare the \$580 in higher taxes to their permanent tax savings that this minister brags so much about. The one-earner couple with two children in Thunder Bay making \$50,000 is going to stand to lose—to lose, Minister—\$356 a year. With your own calculator, the two-earner couple with one child in Toronto making \$50,000 will stand to lose \$140 a year. The two-earner couple in Windsor making \$75,000 a year will stand to lose \$75 a year.

Why are the McGuinty Liberals telling worried families that they're going to be better off when clearly they won't?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: What's clear is that the member hasn't even listened to groups and individuals like Hugh Mackenzie, who say that this is a positive tax cut for Ontarians of modest income.

Again, I remind her that she asked me what our policy is. Our policy is to cut taxes for low-income Ontarians, which is exactly what we're doing. In contrast, she and her party laid out a very clear policy. They said, in a letter to Premier McGuinty dated November 2007, "Raise the provincial sales tax 1%." That would have hit low-income Ontarians. That would have hurt the poorest in our society. It shows no vision and no understanding of reality. To make matters worse, it's no wonder she's got her math all wrong: She refused to get a briefing from the Ministry of Finance. She wouldn't take us up on it. Mr. Hudak did; the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

PROVINCIAL PURCHASING POLICY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Acting Premier. Yesterday, the government announced funding for two of Toronto's transit city lines, which is something that we support. But without a buy-Ontario requirement there is no guarantee that the value-added transit vehicle manufacturing work is going to take place right here in Ontario. Why is this government missing an opportunity to create long-term jobs by rejecting a buy-Ontario policy?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member would know that in fact we do have a policy on procurement, which calls for a minimum of 25% Canadian content, recognizing, of course, that Ontario is an exporting province that relies on no retaliation from other jurisdictions, which the member wishes to invite.

I say this as well: She will know that the Toronto Transit Commission has made a policy that says they will have 25% Canadian content. The Toronto Transit Com-

mission is an organization which has, I think, a strong social conscience and recognizes the importance of creating jobs in the province. And we are—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think everyone would agree that money for transit is definitely good, but creating long-term, value-added jobs in our struggling manufacturing sector while making Ontario the international hub for light rail is even better. Ontario families should be able to expect good streetcar service in Toronto and the manufacturing jobs of the future in Thunder Bay, in Mississauga, in Oshawa and in Windsor. A buy-Ontario policy with a 50% transit vehicle manufacturing requirement would get us there. Why is this government rejecting a strong buy-Ontario policy?

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member would understand as well that approximately 82% of the jobs that will be created from the major initiatives that this government is undertaking are in fact jobs which will be helping the province of Ontario, will be in the province of Ontario. That is a substantial number.

I think if you looked at various projects in various jurisdictions, to have 82% of the jobs in your own jurisdiction is rather astounding. So I could play a game, and that game would be, on one particular project you could say 75%, because that particular vehicle, for instance, is made only in Ontario. I don't play that particular game. Nevertheless, we are successful in those bids, and again, overall—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: But what I would hope this minister would understand is that companies are closing down across Ontario and thousands of families are being affected by job loss. The impact is real, yet the McGuinty Liberals are content with spending money on transit without thinking about ways to make those dollars work for our struggling families in this province, in hard-hit communities across Ontario.

Transit spending and bringing jobs for the future to Ontario go hand in hand. Why are the McGuinty Liberals rejecting a buy-Ontario policy for this province?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Well, in fact, we have not. That is the difference. We have created a policy, after very wide consultation with all concerned, of a minimum of 25% Canadian content on any procurement that takes place. Nevertheless, 82% of the jobs in these particular projects will originate in Ontario. Steel will come from the province of Ontario, other products will come from the province of Ontario, and I can assure you that the workers will be from Ontario.

But the member should remember that the people from the province of Ontario who make products for other places do not want to face the kind of retaliation that she invites with the kind of policies that she's advocating at the present time. If you look at vehicles, for instance, 85% of our cars in this province are sold in the United States. How would you like retaliatory—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Frank Klees: The question is to the Minister of Finance. Car dealers experienced the worst March in 12 years in this province. Two months before the tabling of the budget, the PC caucus put forward recommendations to the Minister of Finance and asked him to come to the aid of this industry by providing incentives to consumers. Specifically, we proposed a three-month provincial sales tax holiday, with which we have experience in this province, very successfully, in 1989. There was nothing in this budget at all. In fact, there wasn't even a mention of the auto sector in the minister's speech—nothing—and now, car dealers across this province continue to suffer. I ask the minister, why was there no provision for a provincial sales tax holiday and no aid to the auto industry in this budget?

1100

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Let me address the question. First of all, we do have experience with that, with a tax holiday, and the experience was that it didn't increase vehicle sales. It certainly did not work. What we did, however, and what we are doing: In December, we committed \$1.3 billion to help the auto sector; that member's party didn't support that. We created the AMIS fund, the Next Generation of Jobs Fund. We have helped retool our plants over the last number of years so they can be competitive—and they are and they're among the best plants in the world. That member and his party voted and spoke against those initiatives.

At a time of global economic crisis, this government is the only subnational government that has come through with assistance to the automobile sector. We're proud to be there, and we're going to continue to work with the industry, with the CAW, to help protect that vital footprint in Ontario's economy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: The Minister of Finance has it absolutely wrong. The facts show that when the provincial sales tax holiday was implemented in this province, sales of cars and trucks increased by 17%. In one month, there were 17,500 units that moved off car lots in this province. Why didn't he do the research? Why didn't he do what we asked him to do: a simple sales tax holiday for three months that would stimulate sales, that would help people in the auto sector and car dealers across this province cope with the gridlock on their parking lots? Why did he not include it? The evidence is there that it works. It would have been transparent; it would have been funds that would have gone directly to consumers. He failed to address the issue. Why not?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member said that there's no mention in the budget of the auto sector; I'd refer him to page 15.

The member is right: That one month they did go up, but the next month they fell back down, and there was no increase in sales over time. We don't accept the policy; we think you're wrong about it. We didn't include it. We have, however, included enormous tax cuts for the manufacturing and automotive sector.

I remind the member of some of the quotes from those—let's take Ian Howcroft, Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters: "Overall we're very pleased with today's budget, it addresses many of our long-standing issues and priorities. I think that it shows that the government was listening. We're particularly pleased with regards to the harmonization of the GST and PST, we've been advocating that for a long, long time." They're also pleased with the corporate tax cuts.

I support those folks, people like Ian Howcroft and other independents. We have laid out the right plan for the future. I hope that member—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question?

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. A distraught father, Paul Ceretti of Hamilton, came to Queen's Park yesterday with his six-year-old twins, Mackenzie and Delanie. Both girls have autism and were receiving IBI therapy until the government suddenly terminated Delanie's IBI therapy just nine months into her treatment. But at the same time, the treatment was continued for her twin sister. Delanie is making progress with IBI, but she is not ready to go to school. Will this minister commit to ensuring that Delanie's treatment continues, as recommended by her IBI therapist?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It's world autism day, so I think it's appropriate that we talk about autism. I want to start by saying that I have enormous respect for kids with autism, for adults with autism, and for their parents and their families.

The member has asked about a specific case; of course, I cannot address that specific case, but what I can tell you is that we must leave it to experts to determine who is benefiting from IBI therapy and who would be better served by different supports. I don't think the member opposite would like this to become a political decision. The decisions are made by experts. We have tripled funding for IBI therapy and more than doubled the number of children receiving IBI therapy. It is very difficult when IBI is over and it's time—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Who's more expert than the provider of the service themselves to determine whether or not the girl needs the therapy?

The minister knows that both girls—they're twins—need the IBI services absolutely. It's unacceptable that one twin can receive therapy and the other is cut off when both of them need it and both of them are benefiting from it.

The Premier promised that all Ontario children would be served, regardless of their age. What will this minister do to ensure that Mr. Ceretti will be able to obtain continuing treatment for Delanie, as recommended by her IBI provider and as is her right in this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member, I think, recognizes that there is a continuum of support that is necessary for kids with autism. We have expanded the continuum of supports. We're providing more respite, more summer camp for kids. But most importantly, I think, what we are doing is smoothing the transition from IBI therapy into schools. I'm working very, very closely with the Minister of Education to make sure that kids, as they transition into school, which is where kids belong—that that is done with the support of the school community, the IBI community, and their family.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a question for the Minister of Labour. Minister, as you know, the plight of temporary foreign workers has been in the news lately.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Turn around.

Mr. Mike Colle: Member from Niagara West, this is a very serious issue for people in my riding. I hope he takes this seriously.

Many of these caregivers say they are being exploited and charged thousands of dollars, which they are forced to pay through alternate illegal work if contracts are cancelled. Some even say that they've been forced to work long hours without days off or even minimum-wage salaries.

Minister, the situation that these foreign workers are facing is of great concern to the people of Toronto, to the people right across Ontario, and to me. My constituents and other members of this House all feel something should be done, I hope. Can you please tell us what your ministry is going to do to help protect foreign workers from these abuses?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'd like to thank my colleague and my friend the member from Eglinton-Lawrence for sharing his concerns on this very important matter.

These stories of exploitation of vulnerable workers in Ontario are very disheartening. Many of these temporary workers devote their lives to caring for our loved ones. That is why my ministry intends to introduce legislation to protect foreign workers in Ontario. The proposed legislation would start by banning fees from being charged to these workers. Also, we will be licensing this program. We will target abuses of these workers by providing a 1-800 hotline and outreach, including education and targeted investigations. My ministry will continue to move forward with a made-in-Ontario solution to weed out these unscrupulous agents and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary? The member from Willowdale.

Mr. David Zimmer: Minister, I want to thank you for acting swiftly on this issue to help vulnerable workers in Ontario. The proposed legislation shows that our government is listening to the concerns of some of the most—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Parkdale may want to be in her seat. Order. We're not

setting a very good example for all the guests, particularly the model parliamentarians who are here today.

The member from Willowdale.

Mr. David Zimmer: The proposed legislation shows that our government is listening to the concerns of Ontario's most vulnerable workers. It's a strong program. It will protect workers. It will help families raise their children. It's the right thing to do. But unfortunately, there are always a few bad apples out there. These people are unscrupulous, they prey on men and women who come here through the live-in caregiving program, and they need to be stopped. What else are we going to do in addition to banning fees?

1110

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for Willowdale for being such a great advocate on this important matter. We will be working over the coming weeks to see how Manitoba's legislation works and make sure that we get it right for Ontario. For our part, the province will move to ensure that the rights of caregivers working in Ontario are respected. We will target abuses of these workers by providing a 1-800 hotline, conducting targeted investigations and providing outreach, including education in their native language.

At this time, I would like to thank all of my colleagues, and particularly for the support of MPP Mike Colle. We want to ensure that any approach that is taken meets the needs of this vulnerable population.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question?

Interjections.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. John O'Toole: It's the theatre of the absurd.

My question is to the Minister of Transportation. The government has once again reannounced the GTA transit plan, and I emphasize that this is a reannouncement of a reannouncement, because we've all heard it several times before—first in June 2006 on Bill 104, during the 2007 election, and in your 2007 throne speech you promised to introduce the Move Ontario 2020 plan, which was billed as an historic expansion. Still nothing.

This was almost three years ago. So far, it appears that the Move Ontario plan is stuck in gridlock. The latest announcement looks like it's a way to distract Ontarians from a 13% new tax, increased deficits, increased spending. Minister, how can we trust that you can deliver on this transit plan for Ontario?

Hon. James J. Bradley: First of all, I find it interesting that a member of the Progressive Conservative caucus—at least I think it's the Progressive Conservative caucus—would ask this question, because you will remember when you were in power and part of the government of Premier Harris, at that time you completely abandoned public transit. You got out of the business of GO Transit, for instance. The amount per capita just dwindled completely. Under this government, we have seen very significant—billions of dollars being allocated for public transit. I must say Mayor Miller was there yesterday, applauding the Premier's announcements.

Interjection: Bill Fisch.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Bill Fisch was there applauding the Premier's announcements. Adam Giambrone was there applauding the Premier's announcements. They have faith that at long last, after the previous government, we're going to see action on projects—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: The people who were there at your announcement, you just fired them from the Metrolinx board. They were there to see what was next, because they didn't know what was next.

I'd like to draw your attention to the article, which I'm sure you've been concerned about, in the Toronto Star this morning that says "Transit Gets \$9 Billion Jump Start." But what it says at the end is an interesting question: "It's still not clear where most of the money to implement the Metrolinx plan will come from."

I put to you, the Metrolinx plan, the \$50-billion plan, is \$5 billion a year for 10 years. Let's be honest with the people of Ontario. Where are you going to get the money? Or is this just another announcement?

Hon. James J. Bradley: This is a long-term project, as the member would know. We have made that commitment of \$9 billion.

The projects we talked about yesterday will overall create some 430,000 jobs in the province of Ontario, which is very significant. At long last we have funding that has been allocated by the treasurer of the province of Ontario; that has been approved. We will see shovels in the ground this year and next year on these projects. We have an environmental assessment process which allows them to be very carefully assessed within a six-month period of time. Everybody was enthusiastic and excited about it, because they remember the bad old days when the Tories got out of public funding for public transit.

So, have faith; we are moving forward. Come on board. This is good news for the people of the province of Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

AGRICULTURAL LABOUR POLICY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Today is a sad day for Ontario's 70,000 farm workers. This morning, the Supreme Court of Canada granted the McGuinty government leave to appeal the Superior Court decision that found the Agricultural Employees Protection Act unconstitutional.

As you know, this 2002 act denied farm workers the right to collectively bargain. Farm workers, most of whom work on large factory farms, deserve the protection of unions like all other workers. When will the McGuinty government finally stop its endless and costly legal appeals and grant farm workers the right to join a union and bargain collectively?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I thank the member for the question. The member is aware that it is before the courts. I'm pleased that the Supreme Court of Canada has granted

leave to appeal. The Ontario government believes the Court of Appeal's decision raises issues that should be considered by the Supreme Court of Canada. As the case remains before the courts, I say to the member, it is not appropriate for me to comment further at this time.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Minister of Labour is the Minister of Labour. It's absolutely appropriate for him to talk about labour issues in this province.

Farm workers are no different from any other workers in the province of Ontario. They work hard each and every day to provide a decent life for their families, but they also tend to work longer hours and for less pay than most other workers.

The reason they don't have protection under unions like the UFCW—in all other provinces, actually, they do have that protection, and that minister knows it. Except for Alberta, all other provinces have granted farm workers the right to collectively bargain.

When will this government stop delaying, stop appealing, stop being unjust to farm workers in the province and finally provide them with the right that all Ontario workers have? That is the right to collectively bargain and join a union.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Our number one priority is the health and safety of Ontario workers. That's why, when we looked at our farms and agriculture, we ensured that we brought forward the Occupational Health and Safety Act to cover those workers.

What the member is asking, as she well knows, is before the court. It is before the Supreme Court of Canada. We believe that there are issues that need to be looked at by the Supreme Court. Those are being done, and I ask that the member wait and see what the court has to say.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question is for the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services. My riding of Ajax-Pickering is home to many small businesses, both medium and large in size. These businesses are vital to our community and are key contributors to our local economy.

Minister, I often hear from local small business owners that they are overwhelmed by the amount of red tape they face when dealing with government. Business owners would like to spend less time completing paperwork and spend more time focusing on growing their businesses, particularly in these challenging economic times. What is the government doing to cut red tape and ease the paper burden on our small businesses in Ajax-Pickering and Ontario?

1120

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to thank the member from Ajax-Pickering for asking this question, and I also want to welcome his wife to the Legislature.

The member is right. I think small businesses are the major contributor to the economic well-being of our province. He's also right that some of the small busi-

nesses are facing some challenges at this point in time. That's why our government has a very aggressive agenda to make sure that we cut red tape.

Through the Small Business Agency of Ontario, which is part of my ministry, we are moving very aggressively to make sure that businesses can focus on their businesses, rather than focusing on filling out forms for the government. In the first phase of our project, in seven ministries we cut down the paperwork by about 24%. In the second phase, in the next eight ministries, we cut it down by 25.6%. Now we are working on the 10 ministries so that we can—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'm pleased to hear the minister speak about the reduction of the paper burden on our small and mid-sized businesses. No doubt, it will make a difference.

But the red tape for businesses in my riding isn't just the paper burden. To operate, every business has to ensure it has the right licences and permits in place from federal, provincial and municipal bodies, such as Ajax and Pickering. Getting all of this sorted out can be onerous, overwhelming and costly, as it could delay the opening of a new business.

We all want to see more entrepreneurs up and running as quickly as possible. Can the minister tell me and my constituents what, if any, actions are being taken to help businesses in terms of getting the right licences and permits for their operations?

Hon. Harinder Takhar: To the Minister of Government Services.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm pleased to weigh in on this important issue. I thank the member for the question.

In this regard, I'm particularly pleased to let members of the assembly know about an initiative called BizPal. BizPal is a partnership between all levels of government which makes it easier for businesses that want to start up to get the licences and the permits that they need. It's a one-stop shop, so to speak. If you want to open a new restaurant or if you want to expand your chain of stores or whatever, you can go there and get the help you need. I'm pleased to say that there's one in Ajax-Pickering. That's one of the municipalities we're working with. Tomorrow, I'll be in my beloved Hamilton, making an announcement about the BizPal expansion there, because, to be frank—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Minister of Transportation: Reading my paper this morning, I did a double take on the headline "GTA Transit Gets a \$9B Boost." The ink is barely dry on the budget. We didn't see \$9 billion of Ontario taxpayers' money mentioned.

Minister, we ask again: Can you tell the people of Ontario where the \$9 billion is coming from? What is the federal share? What is the Toronto share?

Ontario taxpayers in my riding of Haldimand–Norfolk are paying for this \$9-billion transit boost for Toronto, yet they get nothing.

Minister, my question: When can rural residents—for example, in Haldimand–Norfolk—expect to hear news from you of their very own public transit funding announcement?

Hon. James J. Bradley: This is a “spend” question, by the way—we’re in the second half of question period. Now the Conservatives want to spend money, and I’m happy to see that. The first half of the question period is always “save money”; the second is “spend money.” That’s why it’s called the Progressive Conservative Party.

First of all, already we have seen \$2.5 billion in new funding to go since 2003—over \$750 million in 2008-09.

You’ll remember the gas tax. You people refused to share the gas tax with the people of the province of Ontario. Our government has shared the gas tax this year: some \$321 million shared with municipalities; two cents of the gas tax. They have appreciated that very much. It has allowed them to expand their services, enhance their services, make them more comprehensive and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: You’re right, Minister; we remember the gas tax, and I ask you not to rub it in. My riding got nothing from that gas tax. Three weeks ago, you said no to sharing two cents a litre with municipalities. Haldimand county and Norfolk county got nothing.

Your McGuinty government has been making these gas tax announcements since 2004. Nothing for Dunnville, nothing for Caledonia and other small towns, in spite of their lobbying, the petitions I bring into the House—the last one had over 1,000 names. They want an answer—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of the Environment, I may have to retract what I said in a TV interview about you.

You have 10 seconds.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Don’t rub it in. We get nothing in the gas tax. We pay 14.7 cents a litre like everybody else—nothing from this \$9-billion announcement—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. It’s Thursday. I think we would like to get through question period. I’m very happy, though, to continue to stop the clock.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I’ve been as helpful as I could today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): You’re not being helpful right now, member from Renfrew.

I would just ask the co-operation and indulgence of all members of the House to tone it down a little, please, and let’s allow the questioning to continue.

Minister of Transportation.

Hon. James J. Bradley: First of all, the member would know that those municipalities that have de-

veloped transit programs in recent years have been eligible for gas tax, the many communities that have done so. But since 2003, our government has provided \$2.3 billion in funding to support road and bridge projects across the province; \$1.1 billion, announced under the Investing in Ontario Act in August 2008, for municipal infrastructure that can be used for roads, bridges transit and other projects; the municipal infrastructure investment initiative, \$450 million in one-time funding to support municipal infrastructure priorities, such as roads and bridges, in communities across Ontario; the \$400-million road and bridge fund, announced in the 2008 budget; the Ontario Infrastructure Projects Corp. loan program, which provides long-term loans to municipalities for critical infrastructure projects; the RED program under the auspices of the Ministry of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Last week’s budget cut more than \$2 billion in corporate income taxes, but the minister knows full well that to benefit from corporate income tax cuts, companies must be profitable. The companies that are make money in this economic climate are not the same companies that are shedding Ontario jobs by the tens of thousands and may not be the companies creating jobs of the future. My question: Will the minister admit that his \$2-billion corporate tax cut is the wrong policy at the wrong time and is simply bad economics when it comes to job creation?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I am glad that the member at least acknowledges that there’s an important role for corporate tax cuts. That’s why last year we eliminated the capital tax for manufacturers. That tax accrues to any company, whether or not it’s making money. For instance, a number of forestry companies in northern Ontario applauded that. The forestry sector industry applauded this—

Mr. Howard Hampton: Name them.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Do you want them in alphabetic or numeric order?

This is the right policy for Ontario. The member voted against the capital tax elimination for forestry, farmers and manufacturers. I don’t know why you would have done that. It put cash in their hands last July. Tens of thousands of other businesses are going to benefit from this. But what we’re most proud of is \$10.6 billion in personal tax cuts for the lowest-income citizens among us.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: Minister, here is the truth of the matter: Liberals believe in shovelling billions of dollars out the door to already profitable companies in the faint hope that maybe a few jobs will be created. New Democrats support the highly targeted approach successfully used in both Quebec and Manitoba, which only rewards companies making real investments and creating real jobs. One is a philosophy of listening to big business.

When they say "Jump," you ask, "How high?" The other is a tightly focused one on real-world economics by creating real jobs for real people. Will the minister admit his \$2-billion corporate tax giveaway is bad economics and nothing more than unseemly pandering to powerful and already profitable corporate interests?

1130

Hon. Dwight Duncan: It's interesting, but one of the facts that the member opposite overlooks is that Manitoba has actually lost 16% of its manufacturing jobs—almost three times as high as Ontario—in the last year.

We have taken a balanced approach to public policy, an approach that saw us last year eliminating the capital tax for manufacturers in the forestry industry, which was applauded across the board by them. That cash flowed into their hands last July. That cash was used to keep people working and to keep plants operating.

There's more to do. That's why we have cut corporate tax rates. That's why the forest sector industry came out and said, "This is a very good budget for the forest products industry." In a period of obvious economic challenges, this is the right course of action.

I reject what he says; we reject their philosophy. We're building a new Ontario for a stronger—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Reza Moridi: I have a question for the Minister of Transportation. Yesterday, the minister announced, along with the Premier, York regional chairman Bill Fisch and many others, that this government will be funding the development of a bus rapid transit system for our Viva public transit.

First of all, Minister, on behalf of the people of Richmond Hill, I would like to thank you for the huge investment. Our relatively young transit system in York region has been an enormous success. As you know, demand has been outstripping our ability to service riders. We need to move faster in getting people out of single-occupancy vehicles and onto public transit.

Would the minister tell me and my constituents of Richmond Hill a little bit more about this investment, when we can expect to get shovels in the ground and how a bus rapid transit system will—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'd like to thank the member for Richmond Hill for an excellent question about the announcement yesterday which includes a \$1.4-billion investment to improve the York region Viva bus rapid transit system. The Viva bus system is already a very successful transit system, and we want to make it even better.

One of the problems has been the traffic gridlock which buses can often find themselves in. In order to make transit more attractive to people, we need to ensure that the buses are not sitting in the same traffic that they're trying to avoid. That is why we're funding the development of a network of separate lanes for buses,

including bypass lanes along Highway 7 and the Yonge Street corridor through Richmond Hill. We can expect that people will be at work this year on this project. Components of the network will be up and running in two years, and the remainder by 2013. That's quick action.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from York South–Weston.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: To the Minister of Transportation: Yesterday's announcement totalled more than \$7 billion in transit projects for the people of Toronto. Without question, this is the single largest investment in public transit in the city in decades.

One of the projects being funded, the Eglinton cross-town rapid transit line, will be of enormous benefit to my constituents in the riding of York South–Weston. I understand that this will span the entire length of the city and connect as far west as Pearson International Airport. This will provide people in underserved areas with new public transit, connecting them to the rest of the city and providing new opportunity to families across my riding and beyond.

Given the importance of this project, would the minister please tell us more about it and let us know when we can expect things to get moving?

Hon. James J. Bradley: As the member would know, public transit is more than simply moving people from A to B; it's often about connecting communities and about ensuring that underserved neighbourhoods get access to quality transportation and are properly connected to schools, hospitals and employment opportunities.

We're excited about the Eglinton crosstown rapid transit project. That is why we announced that we will be investing \$4.6 billion to make it easier for people to move across the GTA—to Kennedy station, to Pearson airport. As you know, it will take some time to build a project of this magnitude, but we are confident that our commitment to fund this project will make it a reality. We need to be reducing greenhouse gases. We need to reduce gridlock, connect communities and move our economy forward.

I would like to recognize our provincial agency, Metrolinx, for all their hard work and all the work the city of Toronto has done to get us to the point where these projects are in fact becoming a—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Minister, in response to a recent question, you stated that the average family's electricity bill would only rise by 1% under the new Green Energy Act. Subsequently, you gave me a vague breakdown of where those costs would come from. What you didn't account for was the cost of backup generation for wind and solar, because, to use your words and the Premier's words, they're not reliable.

Are you promising that an average family's hydro bill of about \$1,000 per year will only rise by \$10 in each of the next 10 years?

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. I repeat what I've offered the honourable member on several prior occasions. We'd be very happy at the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure to establish for the honourable member a foundation briefing that gives him some insight into the overall energy supply mix in Ontario. I have mentioned before in the Legislature that 75% of all of Ontario's electricity needs last year were met by a combination of emission-free nuclear and emission-free hydroelectric power. On top of that, the renaissance of our energy sector has seen the emergence of several gas-fired plants which provide reliability in those circumstances when ratepayers demand more electricity. In the space between that foundation and those gas-fired peaker plants are tremendous opportunities to integrate a greater degree of renewable energy. That's what the Green Energy Act is all about.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakubuski: Minister, you like to use Germany as an example when attempting to inculcate people, which I know you're going to be doing some more of this afternoon, with the benefits of your Green Energy Act. What you don't tell them is that power in Germany is about 24 cents a kilowatt hour, and it is now planning to build—get this—at least 15 new coal plants to back up the wind in its system when the wind is not blowing.

Minister, don't you think it's time that you came clean with the people of the province of Ontario and told them exactly what electricity will cost them when fully implemented under your Green Energy Act?

Hon. George Smitherman: I don't know who's been inculcating the honourable member but it's not working very well. The Green Energy Act is about a portion of our overall energy supply mix, and unlike Germany, Ontario is going to continue to rely, as an example, on Niagara Falls. The honourable member's question, where he seeks to frighten people about electricity costs, gets deeply into apples-and-oranges comparisons which lose perspective quickly. We have natural advantages here in Ontario that Germany does not enjoy. They have some big rivers there but they don't travel quite like ours, and therefore they don't have hydroelectric power to the proportion that we do.

Similarly, we have a strong foundation of reliable nuclear power which provides power to us at a very reasonable price. This is different from the circumstance that's occurring, and that's why it's not really a fair comparison for Ontarians to talk about Germany and Ontario. But we do think Germany has been pretty effective at a model—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

OFFICE DES AFFAIRES FRANCOPHONES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones. À la page

97 du budget, on retrouve les budgets alloués à tous les ministères de la province. Il y en a 36 en tout. Tous les ministères ont reçu une augmentation ou sont demeurés stables, sauf un : l'Office des affaires francophones, qui a subi une coupure de 7,3 %.

Nous sommes 549 000 Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes ici, ce qui veut dire près de 5 % de la population de l'Ontario. Par contre, le budget de l'Office ne représente que 0,0047 % du budget de l'Ontario.

Ma question : étant donné que le budget de l'Office est si minuscule, comment peut-on justifier qu'alors que le budget de l'Ontario a augmenté de 12 %, le budget de l'Office des affaires francophones s'est fait couper de 7,3 %?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Excellente question du membre de l'opposition. Je voudrais la rassurer que le pourcentage qui a été coupé—l'an dernier, vu que c'était le 20^e anniversaire de l'adoption de la Loi sur les services en français, nous avons eu de l'argent supplémentaire pour les célébrations de cette fête-là. Alors, on n'en a pas besoin cette année. On l'a eu l'an passé. On a fêté, et voilà. Maintenant nous sommes revenus à notre budget.

Il y a eu, par contre, une augmentation au bureau du commissaire aux services en français. Alors lui, il a eu une augmentation. C'est inclus aussi dans notre budget. Alors, l'office n'a pas eu une réduction de budget : il a eu une légère augmentation de son budget.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: On a point of order, Speaker: I'd like to point out to you that I have here a copy of the public accounts for 2007-08 for the Smart Systems for Health Agency. Contrary to what the Minister of Health stated, there is no breakdown of expenses for food, travel and entertainment or for the CEO's office.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It's not a point of order, but I trust the honourable member and the minister may have a discussion following question period or perhaps pursue that line of questioning next week in question period.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1141 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Before I introduce my guests in the gallery, I would like unanimous consent for us to wear this purple ribbon here in the House today. It is to recognize the tragedy that happened in Oxford county late last year, and it will relate to my private member's bill later on this afternoon.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to introduce the group who made the ribbons we are wearing or we have just approved to wear: Lori Vollmershausen and her students from Victory Memorial School in Ingersoll. These students were taught about values and good decision-making by

Laurie Hawkins, an OPP officer who passed away from carbon monoxide poisoning in December. They are here today to attend the debate on the Hawkins Gignac Act, and I'd like to welcome them here and thank them for coming here and making these ribbons for us to wear.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: First of all, I would like unanimous consent to wear the Autism Ontario pins today on World Autism Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you.

I would like to introduce some guests who will be joining us momentarily: Marg Spoelstra, Carly Fleischman, Pat Lalonde, Lauren Dora, Kylie Proulx, Sheila Laredo, Lisa Prasuhn and Caroline Prasuhn, Lisa's daughter; also, Josh Chilcott from Guelph and his mom, Joelle. They're here to celebrate Autism Awareness Day.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Frank Klees: It is my privilege to pay tribute to Pope John Paul II on this, the fourth anniversary of his death.

Two years ago today, I first tabled my private member's bill, An Act to declare Pope John Paul II Day in Ontario on April 2. On February 19, this Legislature participated in second reading debate on that bill, and it was passed unanimously. Over the past two years, my office has received thousands of signatures in a continuous stream of petitions calling on the Legislature to enact this bill.

Today, we join together as Canadians of diverse religious and cultural traditions to reflect on the impact of Pope John Paul II on a world that is all too often beset by violent conflict and social injustice. His message to the nations throughout his ministry was simple, yet profound: "Be not afraid." In a world that is experiencing the most serious economic upheaval since the Great Depression, these words have particular relevance today in every corner of the world.

To ensure that generations of Ontarians would have the benefit of Pope John Paul's wisdom, I call on the Premier and all members of this House to call for third and final reading and pass into law the Pope John Paul II Day bill, which would ensure that, on every April 2, Ontarians would be reminded of the legacy of this great spiritual leader and defender of social justice.

ORAL HEALTH

Mr. Dave Levac: April is Oral Health Month, and to kick off this month, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Health Promotion will take part in a Brush-a-mania event tomorrow at St. Isaac Jogues Catholic School in Toronto. My colleague and friend the member from Scarborough-Rouge River, Bas Balkissoon, is a big supporter.

In its ninth year, Brush-a-mania is designed for children grade 6 and under. It educates and motivates kids to use good oral health practices and familiarizes them with the role of dentistry in their lives. Organized by the Toronto East Dental Society, the Rotary Club of Toronto-Don Mills and the Ontario Dental Association, Brush-a-mania has already reached more than 300,000 students.

This government is also committed to improving the health of all Ontarians, including their oral health. In fact, we continue to work with public health units, community health centres and aboriginal health centres across this province, and dentists and dental hygienists, to deliver prevention and treatment services for low-income Ontarians, especially children. We are now expanding the children in need of treatment—CINOT—program, to include children up to the age of 18 years old. This program already provides essential dental care for over 30,000 children in low-income homes.

As many of us know, cavities are a transmissible, infectious disease that damages teeth and gums. Other than the common cold, Toronto Public Health and other health units, including my own in Brant, confirm that dental decay is the most frequent condition suffered by children and it is one of the leading causes of children missing school, second only to asthma.

We all want to support this, so let's go to www.brushamania.ca.

SENIORS

Mr. Peter Shurman: I rise today to call the attention of this House to the challenges that our working seniors now face when it comes to collecting their benefits.

Hazel, my constituent, who will be celebrating her 70th birthday this April, recently came to see me at my office seeking help. She works in an administrative position. She brings tremendous energy, experience and dedication to her work. A few months ago, she was told by her employer that she was no longer entitled to her benefits. I met with Hazel, and I do not envy her employer being on the wrong side of that argument. She puts most 40-year-olds to shame. Not surprisingly, she was successful in securing compensation.

Despite her personal success, however, Hazel felt that I should be aware of the potential for injustice that working seniors face in their jobs. Seniors should not have to fight for what they have earned.

In 2005, this Legislature eliminated mandatory retirement, but the Liberal government neglected to protect working seniors from these kinds of clawbacks. Lifting the mandatory retirement age did not change the provision of benefits. It's a big gaping hole in the legislation and it should be addressed immediately. Age should not determine the treatment of employees.

I am here to protect my constituents, especially those who have contributed so greatly to building our province, and I am calling on the McGuinty government to do the same.

MINISTER'S VISIT

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I rise today to thank the Deputy Premier and Minister of Energy and Infrastructure for his visit to Durham region on Friday, March 27.

Durham region, which is making enormous strides in the area of green energy, hosted Minister Smitherman for a day in which various institutions and business groups shared their enthusiasm for the opportunities that the Green Energy Act can provide.

At an early-morning breakfast on the Whitby-Oshawa border, Minister Smitherman outlined to business, municipal and community leaders his vision for Ontario and his Green Energy Act. He acknowledged that Durham is a community that is at the forefront of this province's energy solutions and noted that Durham currently supplies 30% of Ontario's energy supply through the Pickering and Darlington nuclear stations.

During the day, Minister Smitherman travelled to UOIT, the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, in Oshawa to view world-leading research to create hydrogen fuel from waste steam, a by-product of nuclear energy production. Minister Smitherman was hosted by UOIT president Dr. Ronald Bordessa. He toured the geothermal facility which captures energy from the ground to heat and cool much of the university.

Further in the minister's visit to Durham, he visited Durham College to view first-hand investments being made at the school which are a showcase for the school's programs which will produce the technologists of the future.

To end the Durham tour, the minister addressed members of the Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade at a luncheon for businesses that had been recognized by the board of trade in a program that promotes eco-friendly businesses.

Durham region is a green community and can be—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to start by thanking all of the members who are wearing the purple ribbons in memory of the Hawkins family.

I also want to thank the students from Victory Memorial School in Ingersoll who are here in the public gallery today and who designed and made these ribbons. The ribbon is Cassandra's favourite colour, and the silver puzzle piece represents Jordan's autism and the silver interlocking necklace that Cassandra and her friends bought when they started school together last September. The students are using the donations from the ribbons to create a permanent monument for the family.

Tragically, late last year, the Hawkins family—Richard, Laurie, Cassandra and Jordan—were killed by carbon monoxide poisoning in their Woodstock home. It was later discovered that their gas fireplace had a blocked exhaust vent. For all of us who feel safe in our homes, it was a tragic and shocking reminder of how quickly accidents can happen.

Carbon monoxide leaking into our home is something that we rarely think about, but, sadly, there are many tragedies in Ontario each year due to this poisonous gas. It is tasteless, colourless and odourless, and the only way to protect ourselves and our loved ones against carbon monoxide poisoning is to make sure that we have working carbon monoxide detectors on every level of our homes. That is why I introduced the Hawkins Gignac Act, which would make that the law in Ontario.

Later this afternoon, my private member's bill will be coming forward for second reading debate, and I hope that all members in this House will support it so we can prevent more tragedies like this in the future.

1310

SPORTS CLINIC

Mr. Mario Sergio: I'm pleased to announce that on March 26, about 100 high school students from C.W. Jefferys, Westview Centennial and Emery Collegiate had a day trip of a lifetime as they took part in Generation Change, a sports clinic featuring top athletes from professional sports teams. The event was designed to demonstrate how staying active in sports can help one stay focused, keep disciplined and gain valuable life skills, such as team building and setting goals.

Guests and speakers included players and representatives from the Toronto Argos, the Montreal Alouettes, Tennis Canada and the Ontario Tennis Association, the Toronto Football Club, as well as the Toronto Raptors. I would like to thank Mr. Tony Genco, the president of Downsview Park, for hosting the event.

Generation Change could not have been organized without the help of Sergeant Stephen Hicks and the staff at 31 Division and ProAction Cops and Kids charitable organization. Members of 31 Division were on hand, volunteering their time and athletic skills as well.

This milestone event was made possible because of the unparalleled collaboration of the Toronto District School Board, the police force, the provincial government and dedicated professional athletes.

I was thrilled to have the Minister of Education, the Honourable Kathleen Wynne, come out for the event, and I am tremendously thankful to all the athletes who made the day so memorable. I want to thank you for your time and their time as well.

HAROLD KENNEDY

Mr. Charles Sousa: I rise today to pay tribute to Harold Kennedy, a great public servant from Mississauga. He served as a member of Mississauga city council, representing ward 1, for 26 years, from 1967 to 1994. Sadly, he passed away on Saturday, March 21, at the age of 82.

Throughout his life, Harold exemplified what public service is all about. During his career, he earned a reputation for his hard work in the community, as well as being actively involved in a number of charitable organizations. He gave his time to St. John Ambulance,

the Boy Scouts, the Metro and Credit Valley conservation authorities, and the Lions Club of Mississauga, to name a few.

He is also remembered for his extraordinary service to his constituents. The current ward 1 councillor, Carmen Corbasson, recalls one winter when an elderly woman called Harold's office. The snowplow had left a snow-bank across her driveway, and she was trapped in her home. Before the call could even be made to the works department, Harold had already put on his coat and was heading out the door. When asked where he was going, Harold Kennedy replied, "I'm going to shovel that lady's snow." That says it all. Harold is fondly remembered for his time in office as someone who was sincerely concerned about people first and politics second.

In fact, Harold comes from a family that has made an incredible contribution to our city and our province. He was a son of a town councillor and a trustee; his uncle was Thomas L. Kennedy, our former Premier; and his brother, Douglas Kennedy, represented Mississauga South in this Legislature as a member of provincial Parliament for 17 years. We owe them all a great deal.

Speaker, I would like to offer the Kennedy family sincere condolences on behalf of this House and the residents of Mississauga. Harold Kennedy will be dearly missed, but his memory and example of extraordinary public service will live on.

NURSES

M^{me} France Gélinas: In the last couple of days, 37,000 hours of nursing care have been cut at Quinte Health Care. The centre joins a long, long list of other health care facilities that have either reduced nursing hours, deleted vacant nursing positions or laid off nurses.

It is a depressing list, and I don't think I have time to read them all, but here are some of the agencies and facilities that are cutting registered nurse care: Bluewater Health; Chatham-Kent Health Alliance; Extendicare; Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital; VON Sarnia-Lambton; Windsor-Essex County Health Unit; Windsor Regional Hospital; Grey Bruce public health; St. Joseph's Health Care; Woodstock General; Cambridge Memorial; Guelph General Hospital; St. Mary's hospital; Canadian Blood Services; Hamilton Health Sciences; Joseph Brant Memorial; Niagara Health System; Norfolk General Hospital; St. Joseph's health care, both in Hamilton and Toronto; Headwaters Health Care; William Osler Health Centre; Baycrest hospital; St. Michael's Hospital; Toronto East General Hospital; and Toronto Rehabilitation Institute. The list goes on and on, but I want you to remember that cutting nurses is cutting care.

IMMIGRANTS

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I am very proud to stand here today to talk about Ontario's long and important history of immigration. Whether our fellow Ontarians come from Athens or Alberta, we all have a shared goal

to make this province the best place in the world to call home. We are very fortunate to have people from across Canada and throughout the world who have chosen to make their lives in Ontario, and, like all other Ontarians, they have built the province that we are proud to live in today.

Hamilton has shared an important part of this history. Between 2001 and 2006, over 16,500 immigrants chose Hamilton to raise their families and build our city and province. I am a proud Hamiltonian, Ontarian and Canadian because my parents chose to come to Ontario. In the 1960s, my parents came to Canada from Greece. They had a great deal of hope and a strong desire to make their lives as Ontarians. Now they are proud Greek Canadians and Ontarians who have had an important part in building their community and their province.

Whether you come to Ontario from British Columbia or Bolivia, Nova Scotia or the Netherlands, or even Ireland, as the Premier said yesterday, we are proud Canadians and proud Ontarians at the same time. We are all here to build a better Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): You forgot Ukraine.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Jim Brownell: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 118, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of devices with display screens and handheld communication and entertainment devices and to amend the Public Vehicles Act with respect to car pool vehicles / *Projet de loi 118, Loi modifiant le Code de la route afin d'interdire l'usage d'appareils à écran et d'appareils portatifs de télécommunications et de divertissement et modifiant la Loi sur les véhicules de transport en commun à l'égard des véhicules de covoiturage.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Jim Brownell: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 126, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to make consequential amendments to two amending acts / *Projet de loi 126, Loi modifiant le Code de la route et apportant des modifications corrélatives à deux lois modificatives.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. Brad Duguid: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding committee meeting times for Bill 150.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Duguid: I move that, in addition to its regularly scheduled meeting times, the Standing Committee on General Government be authorized to meet for the purpose of considering Bill 150, An Act to enact the Green Energy Act, 2009 and to build a green economy, to repeal the Energy Conservation Leadership Act, 2006 and the Energy Efficiency Act and to amend other statutes, as follows: to 9 p.m. on Wednesday, April 8 and Wednesday, April 22, and at the call of the Chair on April 14, 15 and 16, 2009.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am very pleased to rise today to mark the second annual World Autism Awareness Day. This day was declared by the United Nations on December 18, 2007. It's a day to raise awareness about autism and to encourage early diagnosis and early intervention. The UN resolution also calls on us to celebrate the unique talents and skills of persons with autism, and that's what I want to do today. As the Minister of Children and Youth Services, I've had the great pleasure of meeting extraordinary people living with autism spectrum disorders—ASD—and I have been inspired by the talents that they offer to the world.

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Last October, I was delighted to attend the Geneva Centre for Autism's annual international symposium. Since 1986, the centre has been bringing together professionals, educators, parents and researchers from around the world. I was particularly impressed and overwhelmed by the talent of a young man with autism whom I met there. Michael Mikulak presented a dynamic comedy routine. As a ventriloquist and a comic, he used a puppet and his talent to leave an audience of over 1,000 international delegates in stitches. At the same conference, we were treated to the vocal stylings of a young woman named Samantha Mutis, who raised the roof with her musical talent. And I will always remember Josh Chilcott, a grade 8 student who is with us today—he was in grade 8 last year. I met him with the Minister of Education at Kortright Hills Public School in Guelph with Liz Sandals last year. I can tell you that Josh knows more about cars than you or I will ever know. I understand he continues to speak on his passion. He is now at high school at Centennial Collegiate Vocational Institute. He's here with his mum today.

While we often focus our attention on children with autism, we must also recognize the strengths, potentials and needs of adults with autism. There are thousands of adults with autism across this province who are making significant contributions in their communities and enriching the lives of others. It is remarkable what people with ASD are doing and achieving with the right supports.

Early last year, the world was touched when an Ontario girl with autism made international news. She is joining us here today; we're expecting her any minute. At the age of 13, Carly Fleischmann was unable to communicate verbally, but after years of support and therapy, she found a way to express herself by typing messages on a computer. In fact, Carly provided extraordinary insight into what it feels like to have autism—she typed it out on a keyboard as “being in a room with a stereo on full blast.” Oh, Carly is with us now?

Mr. Frank Klees: Yes, in the gallery.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'll introduce her when she—oh, is she here? Wonderful. She's up top.

Carly further wrote: “It is hard to be autistic because no one understands me. People look at me and assume I am dumb because I can't talk, or I act differently than them... I think people get scared with things that look or seem different than them.”

Carly's story is inspiring. When asked what she thought other kids with autism could learn by hearing her story, Carly responded by writing the following: “To tell you the truth, I don't know I am a girl with autism that learned how to spell and is now able to tell people what I think. It's not like I built a thousand houses in New Orleans or found a way for people who don't have food get food. I think the only thing I can say is, don't give up; your inner voice will find its way out. Mine did.”

As a society, we need to do everything we can to provide the very best support for our kids. We need to do

everything we can to nurture their strengths and talents and to hear their voices. Lauren Dora is here with her mom, Pat Lalonde. She's another role model in her community. There she is. She's a resident of Kingston and a figure skater who pursued her passion despite a surgery on her knee. With determined and loving support, Lauren went on to win the gold medal in figure skating for eastern Ontario in the Special Olympics.

Today is a day to give due honour to people living with autism as well as the people who support them. I'd like to acknowledge some of those people here in the House today.

Caroline Prasuhn is here with her mom and her dad, her brother and her sister. I understand that Caroline is a whiz on the keyboard herself. Listen to this: She actually can drive a horse-drawn carriage thanks to her skills on the keyboard. Josh Chilcott is here from Guelph with his family. Lauren Dora is here from Kingston. Margaret Spoelstra is here. She's the executive director of Autism Ontario. Sheila Laredo, another dedicated parent, is with us. And of course Carly Fleischmann has joined us. Thank you all so much for being here.

I'd like to emphasize how grateful and how moved I am by the dedication of parents and families of children with autism. These parents devote themselves to tapping the potential of their extraordinary kids. They deserve to be honoured and recognized for the commitment they make to their children every hour of every day.

We are making progress in the support we provide to people with ASD and their families. But today is not a day to focus on government achievements; it's a day to celebrate people with autism and their families. Today is their day. We will continue to do our best to provide support to them to live with dignity and as respected members of Ontario's family.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm very pleased to rise today to formally recognize World Autism Awareness Day.

We certainly are all familiar with the hardships that are faced by people who suffer from autism and by their families and their caregivers. On behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, I want to welcome the families that are here today.

I'm proud to be doing this presentation on behalf of my caucus. I want to recognize the efforts of the parents, the caregivers and the children. What you do each and every day is truly admirable.

I don't think anyone in this House who does not have an autistic child actually knows what it would be like. We do know, though, from listening to parents, many of whom have come to our offices over the years, that these parents make many, many sacrifices when they are faced with the challenge of raising an autistic child.

Today we want to raise awareness, knowledge and understanding. Autism is a lifelong developmental dis-

ability that is particularly hard to diagnose. Most often a child is diagnosed after demonstrating certain behavioural tendencies which signal autism, such as difficulties with social interaction and communication as well as repeated patterns of behaviour and interest.

Unfortunately, autism rates are increasing everywhere. It is now considered one of the fastest-growing developmental disabilities and is increasing by 10% to 17% yearly. It occurs in one of every 165 births. In Ontario alone, it is estimated that there are 70,000 individuals with autism.

All members of this House hear from families who are seeking help for autism-related problems on a regular basis. We hear from families who feel helpless because there are not enough options available to them as they try to care for their children and adults in the best possible way. In my community we have KidsAbility. Because of a lack of funding, it has a long waiting list of children who can't access the centre.

We have a problem that is growing. Obviously, more support is necessary if we are going to support those whose lives are affected. With autism growing, we need to ensure that adequate resources are being spent on diagnosis and treatment. Doing so has the potential to improve the lives of those with autism and their families, as well as reducing the costs of treatment in the long run. I guess that's what we all have to remember: Early intervention is so very, very important.

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We need to take a look at more efficient spending of our resources, providing greater leadership and investment, in order that we can diagnose and treat those with autism.

The frustration people are experiencing when it comes to receiving care is driving some of them to take some very drastic measures to get their message across. We need to remember that it is very frustrating to hear that there is nothing that can be done, and that the waiting list for your child is long. If you are simply told to wait in line, that answer is not good enough. The solution doesn't necessarily lie simply in spending more money; it also involves better management of the money that is currently being invested.

Besides the fact that more has to be done on the part of government in the way of strategy and investment, World Autism Awareness Day highlights the fact that each one of us has a role to play, and we play it today by raising awareness here in this Legislature. By doing so, we can hopefully convey the message being expressed to us, as members of provincial Parliament, who have a duty to uphold the interests of those we represent, that the needs of families being affected by autism are simply not being adequately addressed today.

Above all, by rising today, we are provided with the opportunity, as the minister has done, to acknowledge the tremendous efforts of the families and the individuals who have been affected by autism and to express our heartfelt appreciation for their significant sacrifices and their devotion to the cause. We thank you for your ongoing work.

I hope we can continue to work together in this House to address the inadequacies in the current system, while advocating a stronger commitment to early diagnosis and intervention, so that individuals and families affected by autism are able to see that we are responding and we are doing what we can together to address their needs.

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm glad to rise today to recognize World Autism Awareness Day, and I'm especially proud of the Sudbury chapter of Autism Ontario, who were good enough to provide each and every member of the House with a cute little bracelet. I'm kind of proud of it. It's red, green and blue and says, "Autism Ontario: See the Potential." With the willingness of this House, the Sudbury chapter was gracious enough to give each and every one of us a bracelet, and I hope you will wear it proudly.

To continue with awareness, they also sent two pamphlets, Supporting People with Autism and Autism Ontario, which I was able to put on the desk of each and every member of this House. Those two pamphlets are full of very good information, and I encourage every member of this House to read them so that we are more aware about autism and what can be done.

Autism spectrum disorder affects people around the world, and Ontario is no different. There are about 80,000 Ontarians who are living with autism today. It affects about one in 150 children, mainly boys.

On this day, I would first like to recognize the contribution that our families and friends living with autism spectrum disorder have made to our community. I'm especially proud of the people who are here and the example given by Caroline, Carly and Josh. You are truly an inspiration, and I thank you for coming to Queen's Park today. It reinforced my belief that everyone has something to contribute to this society.

I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge the hard work being done by so many families and organizations across Ontario dedicated to fighting for appropriate service for those in our communities living with autism. Yesterday, I met Mr. Ceretti, who has been fighting for the rights of one of his twin daughters, Delaney, to receive IBI therapy. Delaney got cut off after nine months of therapy. He was here yesterday because he knocked on every door. He tried every way he could to bring therapy back for his daughter, but he couldn't. So he did the last step he could think of, and this is to appeal to the court of public opinion.

I know that Carly would agree with me when I say that if she had been cut off after nine months of therapy, she would have never developed into the young woman that she is; she never would have been able to communicate, and we would be missing out on a world of opportunities. The same thing is playing out for hundreds and thousands of children in Ontario who can't access or get cut off from their therapy after a few weeks, a few months or a year.

This morning, we had parents here from Autism Resolution Ontario, an organization that is challenging the McGuinty government to follow through on its promise to children with autism and implement a well-designed, integrated, funded and managed set of services for autism in this province. They came forward with stories of children. We had Jaiden—Jaiden is a three-year-old. He's a curious, joyful and energetic little boy who has autism. He has been on the waiting list for ABA therapy since September 2007.

We had Mendy, a six-year-old little boy who is diagnosed with autism. He is mainly non-verbal. He's a highly sensory-seeking child. Unfortunately, he has unpredictable outbursts and spends much of his time jumping on his trampoline. He has been on the waiting list for ABA for three years.

We had Sebastian, who was born in April 2003. He has been waiting for therapy since 2007.

We also had Jerry, who was born on September 11, 2000. He was diagnosed when he was 30 months old. He, too, had to go on the waiting list to receive the therapy that he needs.

Right now, the system we have for children with autism is nothing but a shame. Too many kids are waiting too long. This is not the Ontario I want.

Mr. Dave Levac: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Because of an emergency, I was unable to attend introduction of bills, so therefore I would ask for unanimous consent that we revert back to introduction of bills.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Dave Levac: Thank you very much to each and every one of you for the House's indulgence.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CARBON MONOXIDE AWARENESS WEEK ACT, 2009 LOI DE 2009 SUR LA SEMAINE DE LA SENSIBILISATION AU MONOXYDE DE CARBONE

Mr. Levac moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 166, An Act to proclaim Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week / Projet de loi 166, Loi proclamant la Semaine de la sensibilisation au monoxyde de carbone.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Dave Levac: In my conversations with the member from Oxford, his understanding of this bill and my support of his bill this afternoon—if passed, this bill, An Act to proclaim Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week, will proclaim the first week of December in each year as Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week.

Carbon monoxide is a silent killer, as we all know. It's colourless and odourless, and it can rise to deadly levels in a home without anyone even knowing so. The families of Oxford have family in my riding of Brant who have been affected directly by this, and we have reunited the Friends of the Firefighters to raise money to purchase carbon monoxide detectors for the needy. Every Ontarian needs to be educated about carbon monoxide so that we can get rid of this deadly killer.

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PETITIONS

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with the Burk's Falls health centre, and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Burk's Falls health centre provides vital health services for residents of Burk's Falls and the Almaguin Highlands of all ages, as well as seasonal residents and tourists; and

"Whereas the health centre helps to reduce demand on the Huntsville hospital emergency room; and

"Whereas the operating budget for Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is insufficient to meet the growing demand for service in the communities of Muskoka–East Parry Sound; and

"Whereas budget pressures could jeopardize continued operation of the Burk's Falls health centre;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government and Minister of Health provide adequate increases in the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to maintain current health services, including those provided by the Burk's Falls health centre."

I support this petition and I give it to Ahsan.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This petition has to do with property tax assessments.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontarians are angry over the volatility of the MPAC tax assessment system, the near impossibility to predict one's assessment or to understand how it is arrived at, the patent unfairness of assessments and that the current system leaves many homeowners worried they may be forced to sell their homes; and

"Whereas changes are needed that will make Ontario's property tax system stable, understandable, fair and sensitive to homeowners; and

"Whereas property assessments in Parkdale–High Park have risen between 28% and 45% between 2005 and 2008;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: Support the

'freeze till sale' plan to bring fairness to Ontario's property tax system so that new assessments happen only at the time of sale and when a building permit is obtained for renovations totalling more than \$40,000."

I certainly agree with this. I will affix my signature and give it to Olivia to be delivered.

CEMETERIES

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition signed by many constituents from my riding, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's cemeteries are an important part of our cultural heritage, and Ontario's inactive cemeteries are constantly at risk of closure and removal; and

"Ontario's cemeteries are an irreplaceable part of the province's cultural heritage;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government must pass Bill 149, the Inactive Cemeteries Protection Act, 2009, to prohibit the relocation of inactive cemeteries in the province of Ontario."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks' table.

CHILD CARE

Mr. John O'Toole: I have a petition that reads as follows:

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance; and

"Whereas the removal of the temporary care assistance could mean that children will be forced into foster care; and

"Whereas the temporary care assistance amounted to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would receive to look after the same children if they were forced into foster care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse the decision to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren."

I'm pleased to sign and support this as a grandparent.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This has to do with the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, Bill 56, and is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It was given to me by Mr. Jack Fava, who is organizing to support this petition.

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

Since I agree with the petition, I am delighted to sign it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present yet another pile of petitions from the riding of Durham, which read as follows:

"Whereas the municipality of Clarington passed resolution C-049-09 in support of Lakeridge Health Bowmanville; and

"Whereas area doctors, hospital staff and citizens have raised concerns that Bowmanville's hospital could turn into little more than a site to stabilize and transfer patients for treatment outside the municipality; and

"Whereas Clarington is a growing community of over 80,000; and

"Whereas we support the continuation of the Lakeridge ... site through access to on-site services, including emergency room, internal medicine and general surgery;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the McGuinty government take the necessary actions to fund our hospitals equitably and fairly. And furthermore, we request that the clinical services plan of the Central East local health integration network address the need for the Bowmanville hospital to continue to offer a complete range of services appropriate for the growing community of Clarington."

I'm pleased to support this, sign it and present it to page Ahsan.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to present this petition to the House on behalf of my colleague from Perth-Wellington. I'd like to especially thank Sarah Jeffrey, Heather Wamboldt, Brent Germin and David Shaw for having supported it. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs has publicly stated that she 'absolutely' wants to help the beginning and new entrants to agriculture; and

"Whereas beginning and expanding farmers are going to be important in the coming decade, as a record number of producers are expected to leave the industry; and

"Whereas the safety net payments ... are based on historical averages, and many beginning and expanding

farmers were not in business or just starting up in the period so named and thus do not have reflective historic allowable net sales; and

"Whereas beginning and expanding producers are likely at the greatest risk of being financially disadvantaged by poor market conditions and are being forced to exit agriculture because there is not a satisfactory safety net program or payment that meets their needs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately adjust the safety net payments made via the OCHHP to include beginning and expanding farmers, and make a relief payment to the beginning and expanding farmers who have been missed or received seriously disproportionate payments, thereby preventing beginning farmers from exiting the agriculture sector."

I'm pleased to sign this petition and ask page Everett to carry it for me.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. John O'Toole: Another petition here, and this one has been presented to me on a number of occasions by members of the trucking fraternity, Owner-Operator's Business Association of Canada. Jim Park is one of the people here, as is Laura O'Neill, who's government relations for the owner-operator independent truckers. It reads as follows—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: A fraternity? Is that what it is?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's sort of a fraternity.

"Whereas the recently passed Bill 41 with regard to speed limiters on heavy trucks was passed without considering the effect on traffic flow, safety concerns and interstate trucking; and

"Whereas the speed of 105 kilometres per hour creates a dangerous situation on our 400-series highways with consideration to the average speed of traffic flow being 120 kilometres per hour"—and that's an issue in itself; the speed limit's 100.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislature suspend enforcement of the speed limiter law until the Legislature can review all studies conducted pertaining to the effect of this law and road safety concerns; and

"That the Ontario speed limiter law be amended from 105 kilometres per hour to 120 kilometres per hour to remove the increased risk of collisions on our highways and to prevent infringement on interstate trucking out of province and country" travelling on Ontario roads.

I'm pleased to sign this in support of the trucking industry moving our economy and to present it to Sean, one of the pages.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. Mike Colle: I've got a petition here from Sally and Polly, the good people from the DGA Filipino store

in my riding on Marlee Avenue. It's a petition in support of caregivers and Bill 160.

"Whereas a number of foreign worker and caregiver recruitment agencies have exploited vulnerable foreign workers; and

"Whereas foreign workers are subject to illegal fees and abuse at the hands of some of these unscrupulous recruiters; and

"Whereas the federal government in Ottawa has failed to protect foreign workers from these abuses; and

"Whereas, in Ontario, the former Conservative government" under Mike Harris "deregulated and eliminated protection for foreign workers; and

"Whereas a great number of foreign workers and caregivers perform outstanding and difficult tasks on a daily basis in their work, with limited protection;

"We, the undersigned, support Bill 160, the Caregiver and Foreign Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, 2009, and urge its speedy passage."

And I support Sally and Polly at the DGA Filipino store on Marlee Avenue, and I sign this petition.

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CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from a number of constituents from the riding. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents;

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act as above to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks' table.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: The petition here is to the Parliament of Ontario and the Attorney General. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Canadian Judicial Council has been asked by Ontario's Attorney General to probe the judicial behaviour of judges; and

"Whereas judges are human beings and have been known to make serious mistakes in the judicial system, leading to devastating consequences and unfair justice for Canadian citizens; and

"Whereas some judges are known to have fallen asleep in the midst of a trial and have admitted to making serious errors in judgment; and

"Whereas some judges have been observed making biased, disrespectful comments and abusing their judicial powers; and

"Whereas Canadian families need to be protected from these judges who are unable to change their habits, unable to follow the rule of proper conduct and unable to exercise recommendations set by the Court of Appeal, and consequently commit grave injustices;

"Therefore we, the undersigned citizens, are strongly requesting the following changes in our judicial system:

"(1) That a 'judicial demerit point system' be applied to ensure that judges are accountable for their judgments rendered;

"(2) That a yearly review of their performance be established."

I will sign this document, and thank you for allowing me to read this petition.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I have a petition here to the Parliament of Ontario.

"Whereas St. Mary's hospital, Grand River hospital and Cambridge Memorial Hospital in the Waterloo region are experiencing a substantial increase in demand due to population growth; and

"Whereas hospitals in the Waterloo region receive \$279 less per resident compared to other Ontarians;

"Whereas the McGuinty government's policies have contributed to nursing cuts and to other staff cuts, bed closures and the closure of outpatient clinics, all of which reduce the quality of care; and

"Whereas the provincial government has secured significant additional health care funding from the federal government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government provide our hospitals with their fair share of provincial funding and introduce a funding formula based on demographics and the health needs of the population."

I have about 100 residents from Kitchener-Waterloo who have signed it, and I'm pleased to do so as well.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Norm Miller: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the McGuinty government should address the shortage of acute care beds in hospitals by providing alternatives for alternate-level-of-care patients which include but are not limited to an increase in long-term-care beds, an increase in assisted living beds for Ontarians with disabilities, improved access to living at home services and increased hospice/palliative care beds.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Miller moves private member's notice of motion number 79. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'd like to start by saying that I just came from the dentist, where I had a significant amount of freezing, so if this isn't the most perfect delivery today, I at least have a valid excuse, whereas on other days, I don't usually have any excuse.

I'd also like to thank my intern, Meghan Buckham, who has helped with lots of work on this resolution.

I'm pleased to stand on behalf of the 25,000 Ontarians on long-term-care waiting lists and their families to urge the government to address a crisis in our health care system: the lack of resources for alternate-level-of-care patients.

Alternate-level-of-care patients are those waiting in hospital beds who could be better cared for in other parts of our health care system, such as in a long-term-care home, in supportive housing or at home with some home care services. These are just a few of the ways that government could alleviate the shortage of acute care beds.

In January of this year, Tom Closson, Ontario Hospital Association president and CEO, stated, "Without question, the single biggest challenge facing Ontario hospitals is the number of ALC patients waiting in hospitals for alternate levels of care."

Through addressing this issue alone, we would be able to alleviate pressures on other parts of our health care system. It is a win-win for all Ontarians. By increasing and providing alternatives for ALC patients, we can reduce the backlog that hospitals across Ontario are facing.

In my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka, the West Parry Sound Health Centre CEO, Donald Sanderson, said in the Beacon Star that "while he agrees with the province's desire to establish targets to reduce ER waits, they need to understand the alternative-level-of-care issue that tends to bottleneck the system." In other words, hospital beds used for emergency room patients are backed up with ALC patients residing there until they can find them an appropriate setting in the community.

This issue is province-wide. Both the member from Simcoe-Grey and the member for Kitchener-Waterloo have raised this issue. It is facing all of us, across party lines and across this province. Let me share with you some facts.

The Ontario Long Term Care Association has reported that every month, 1,300 long-term-care residents end up in hospital because their homes are unable to provide the increased level of care or their physicians or families are not confident that they can. Additionally, the Ontario Long Term Care Association has reported that 1,700 people in hospital beds are waiting for placement in long-term-care homes.

The Ontario Hospital Association reports that approximately 20% of acute care beds are occupied by alternate-level-of-care patients. In my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka, the percentage is much higher. I recently met with the CEO of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare and separately with the CEO of West Parry Sound Health Centre. They are at 35% to 40% of acute care beds occupied by ALC patients. This is not acceptable.

Through increasing the capacity of alternate-care facilities, we could drastically reduce the number of long-term-care patients taking up acute care beds in our hospitals. This would not only provide better care for these patients but would reduce the undue pressures already placed on our hospitals.

When I met with the CEOs responsible for the hospitals in my riding, the hospitals were full, and I was told that this is not unusual. The target occupancy for hospitals is 85%. This allows room for people coming in through the emergency department and allows for scheduling of surgeries. An 85% occupancy rate also helps the hospital to balance its budget.

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In January 2009, the Canadian Institute for Health Information released a nationwide report on alternate level of care in Canada. The findings reveal a very dire situation for Ontario. Ontario reports the highest rate of ALC hospitalizations across the country. ALC patients admitted to hospital, on average, spend 22 more days there compared to non-ALC patients. Eighteen per cent of alternate-level-of-care patients in Ontario are discharged home while still waiting for a placement with a long-term-care home—obviously, that is not an ideal situation. Alternate-level-of-care patients discharged from hospital also face a higher likelihood of being re-admitted into hospital within 30 days of discharge, compared to non-alternate-level-of-care patients. This reveals the shortcomings of the initiatives taken by the McGuinty government thus far. ALC patients are also twice as likely to have one or more disorders, and that signals the increasingly complex care that is required.

When our party was in power, we understood the needs of our seniors. We built 20,000 new long-term-care beds to give seniors the care they require. We recognized that seniors deserve decent and safe housing, through the redevelopment of 16,000 beds in older facilities.

Alternate-level-of-care patients in this province deserve better. They don't deserve to be languishing in hospital beds far away from their communities, their friends, their families. They not only need care, but they need people to sit and spend quality time with them: play bridge, read a book, give companionship. ALC patients don't get this in a hospital setting.

As well, there are groups of Ontarians who are being entirely overlooked: people with developmental disabilities and acquired brain injuries. Karen Jobbins, a woman I have mentioned many times before, was placed in the Pines, a long-term-care home in my riding, in the town of Bracebridge. Karen has a developmental disability. She doesn't belong in a long-term-care home, but because adequate individualized funding isn't available, she has been inappropriately placed. Constituents with acquired brain injuries, like Jordan Hack and David Crossthwaite, would like to have options available to them, but without the funding to support them, they face the same fate. The province continues to fail to give these Ontarians options.

Long-term-care beds are being taken out of the system for those who need them, and in turn, hospitals become backed up because ALC patients move into acute-care beds.

Both of the hospitals in my riding face financial difficulties because ALC patients are occupying acute-care beds. In the case of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare, they're facing a \$2.3-million deficit this year. They have an accumulated debt of \$7 million, despite the fact that through amalgamation and other measures they have trimmed their costs by some \$4 million. This places a significant burden on the hospital administration, and consequently, they are looking at deficits. This story is being repeated throughout the province. It's ridiculous, unsustainable and needs to be addressed now.

I have provided numerous ways the government could alleviate this problem: an increase in long-term-care beds, an increase in assisted-living beds for Ontarians with disabilities, improved access to living-at-home services, an increase in hospice palliative care beds.

I'm urging all members of this House to support this very important resolution that would not only make life better for seniors in my riding, but in yours, too. The number of Ontarians waiting for long-term-care beds has increased from 12,000 in 2005 to 25,000 currently. The effects are being felt across this province. With a large aging population, seniors are becoming more and more dependent on the services that allow them to live in comfort and in dignity. This does not mean living in a hospital. These people are asking for our help. As legislators of this province, it is our job to do the right thing and make life better for these people. This means supporting this resolution, so I ask all members to support this resolution today.

That's the end of my prepared speech, and I have two minutes left. I would just like to use that time to go over the specific situation I experienced at the beginning of this year when I met with the CEO, Donald Sanderson, at West Parry Sound Health Centre. The day I was there, he showed me his daily bed utilization report. What it showed was that on February 12, 2009, the occupancy of the hospital was 104%. That was because the total number of beds was 70; the total beds occupied was 73; the number of patients in ER—emergency room overflow—was three. The number of ALC patients in 43

acute-care beds, 16; the percentage of acute-care beds occupied by ALC patients, 37%. If you look in the hospital, the total of all alternate-level-of-care patients was 29. So of the total of 70 available beds, that means that 41% of the beds in the hospital are occupied by people who really would be better served either being at home or in a long-term-care home. With the demographics the way they're going, this situation will only get worse. Hospitals aren't going to be able to solve their budget problems, and they aren't going to be able to provide proper care.

How do you plan for the unplanned when your hospital is at 100% occupancy? How do you plan for surgery? How do you plan for the emergency that walks in? How do you plan for births when your hospital is at 100% occupancy?

As I previously pointed out, the target occupancy they aim for is 85%. That allows them to plan for surgery; that allows them to deal with emergencies and not have the emergency room backed up; that allows them to have a better shot at being able to balance their budgets.

This is a big problem, and I really hope that all members will recognize it and encourage the government to move forward to try to solve this problem, because it affects not just the hospitals in Parry Sound–Muskoka; it affects the hospitals that are in your ridings as well. We need to deal with this problem to get our health system working better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a privilege to stand and speak to the motion of the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. I absolutely agree; I couldn't agree more. It's refreshing to see his activism on behalf of his community. Certainly my hope is that we're all that active on behalf of all of our communities.

Let me tell you the situation from Parkdale–High Park's point of view. You heard the facts and figures. The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka was very inclusive and extensive about facts and figures. The human face of what this looks like is exemplified every day in our own hospital, at St. Joe's in Parkdale–High Park. Every day you will find people arriving in the emergency ward of Parkdale–High Park's hospital, St. Joe's—a wonderful institution with a wonderful CEO—and they're there because of detox reasons, addiction issues, mental health issues and homelessness issues. Sometimes it's better to sleep in a hospital bed than it is over a grate. People will go into emergency rooms of hospitals just to do that, and that's not even touching the primary concern of the member, who was talking about alternate level-of-care people—those seniors, for example, who need long-term care; those people in rehab situations who need long-term care. The beds are not available, so they take up hospitals' acute-care beds when they need long-term care. This is not even talking about that. This is a whole other level of person who needs assistance from the health care system, isn't getting it, and the only possibility in sight is the hospital. They also

need assistance from the Ministry of Housing, they're not getting it, and the only solution is a hospital.

There have been studies done in New York and Vancouver now showing how much it costs to keep someone homeless. That sounds bizarre, but it's true. The amount is \$40,000 to \$55,000 a year. One of the largest components of that cost is the use of social services like hospitals because the folks are homeless. It costs a great deal more money to take up a hospital bed than it does to book someone into a reasonably decent hotel, and the former housing minister even admitted as much. He said that it would be cheaper to put somebody in a motel than it would be to keep them on the streets. That's the ridiculous reality that we live in. So it's not a question of money; it's a question of political will.

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When it comes to drug addiction and detox centres, we don't have enough. The average wait for folk in my riding who have an addiction issue, who want to go into rehab, who desperately want help, who want to go into detox, is about six months. If they're lucky enough to get into detox, they're lucky indeed. For the rest, where do they go? They go to emergency rooms. Anyone who has been to an emergency room in Toronto late at night looks around that room and knows that the vast majority of people there are there because of addiction issues, mental health issues or concurrent disorders. That's who's in the emergency room.

What is the hospital to do with all of those people? They're compassionate people who work in hospitals. Our doctors and nurses do a great deal of work with very little in terms of resources. They're not about to send somebody out on the street to detox over a grate if they can help it. A great many problems they see are as a result of the lack of supportive housing, the lack of rehabilitation beds, the lack of response to addiction issues which is systemic across Ontario and, of course, as the member himself elucidated, the lack of long-term-care beds—long-term care.

When my husband and I were in Sweden—yes, it is the promised land for social democrats. Did you know that in Sweden, you can stay at home and have a relative paid a salary to look after you if you have Alzheimer's or if you have any condition that requires long-term care? Today is international autism day. If your parent has to take time off work, the Swedish government recognizes that as real work. It recognizes it as a real calling, a real profession, to look after somebody who has challenges, and they pay you for doing it. They pay you for doing it.

We have a situation in Ontario where the people who are in the profession of doing it don't even get paid for most of their time. Imagine driving 900 kilometres a week and not getting paid for travel time. That's the situation of some of our caregivers right now who provide home care, and that's one among many of the reasons that we have 3,000 SEIU Red Cross home care workers on rotating strikes across the province as I stand and speak. Why are they striking? Because of the 900 kilometres a week they drive without recompense, but also

because they're earning around \$12.50 an hour, slightly over minimum wage, for all the training that they've had to undertake, for all the screening that's had to be done, to look after our nearest and dearest, to look after our seniors. That's how little we value them. And let's face it, that's what the government is telling our seniors, our folk who are stuck at home who need home care: They're telling them that they're worth \$12.50 an hour.

Again, if they need long-term care in an institution, God bless, good luck, because they're in for a long-term wait, and probably that long-term wait is going to be done far more expensively and far less efficiently in a hospital, taking up a bed that needs to be used for acute-care patients. That's what hospitals are for. They are not for housing people, they're not for detoxing people, they're not for dealing with long-term systemic supportive housing issues, they're not there for housing seniors, they're not there for rehabilitation that's going to take a long time; they're there for acute care. But we don't use them that way. This government doesn't use them that way.

It's not even a question of dollars. I wish it was only a question of dollars. I wish it was only a question of asking the government to spend more. But in this particular case, it's asking them to spend more wisely. We need more long-term-care beds. We need some kind of standard of care for those who've worked so hard and given so much—that is, our seniors—who have done nothing wrong with their health. They probably don't have a health issue. They have just got to the point in their lives, in their 80s, 90s or perhaps earlier, where they need some kind of basic care, where they cannot live on their own. These are people who've paid their taxes, who've worked hard, who've raised their families. If they don't have the resources—and even if they do, because I know many, many elderly people in my riding who had to sell their house to move into long-term care and have lived longer than the house lasted in terms of paying for that long-term care. Then they go into a place with worse quality of care where the standards are lower, and guess what? It's not the problem of the staff in long-term care. In fact, I have a stack of cards this high in my office signed by workers in long-term-care facilities that all demand 3.5 hours per day of client care, and they're not funded to get it.

I remember one really sad story of a woman who works overtime consistently without pay in a long-term-care home because she actually really cares for her clients and simply can't get the work done in the normal course of eight hours. She works overtime without pay. She said that one week she calculated how much she was making per hour and it was less than minimum wage, if she was actually paid for the overtime she did. She said that some days she's alone on a floor, and said there could be somebody dying down the hall, and if they're not hitting the button for emergency care she wouldn't know. She wouldn't get to them for about an hour, at least.

Is this what our seniors deserve? Is this what this government is offering them? Not only do we need more

long-term-care beds; we need more long-term-care funding, and we need wiser funding across the health care spectrum that doesn't go to acute-care beds when it should go to long-term-care beds. This is absolutely critical.

Meeting with long-term-care workers and long-term-care residents: If you've ever had the pleasure of going into your own long-term-care homes—I know that every member has on occasion, if only to receive their cards of complaints and demands—you'll see seniors who are articulate, wonderful people who, because of lack of stimulation and lack of physical activity, lack of attention, deteriorate a great deal faster than they would if they were allowed to stay at home and had home care provided or had someone in their family paid to provide it, or had a consistent 3.5 hours or more—one would hope more—of client care per day by those who are in the long-term-care homes.

You can watch this deterioration. It's sad. It's pathetic. Family members phone us all the time and demand action, but there isn't action. This is a government, after all, that in their 2008-09 budget, the one we just had, promised long-term-care facilities an extra 2,500 personal support workers and an extra 2,000 nurses. Instead of the extra 2,000 nurses and 2,500 support workers, what do we have? We have them cutting nurses. We have them cutting nurses across the board in Ontario. Just speak to the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario and you will realize this is going on, not to mention the attrition from retirement.

Instead of a bump up, we get action in the negative. Instead of money into long-term care in the budget, we get over \$2 billion in corporate tax cuts for corporations that need it the least. Instead of bailing out our seniors, instead of bailing out those with mental health and addiction issues, instead of bailing out and providing housing for the homeless, the CEOs across Ontario will get a big tax refund in the mail. And quite frankly, only the profitable companies that need it least will get that big gift at tax time.

What could \$2 billion pay for in long-term care? What could \$2 billion pay for in terms of freeing up acute-care beds for the uses they should be put to; that is, acute care? What would \$2 billion purchase in terms of housing for those who are crowding emergency rooms with housing issues? What could \$2 billion have bought but didn't because clearly the McGuinty Liberals have priorities in other places? Clearly, large corporations are more important to them than those who need the beds.

Therefore, I support the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka's motion. I look forward to voting for it.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'm pleased to speak to the motion by the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka. I would like to provide some comments on his motion and a little bit about the activity of this government over the past five years in the health care sector.

When our government took office, we recognized that hospitals across the province were experiencing ALC pressures, and I must tell you we have implemented a plan that has taken a coordinated approach to address those challenges. Our current 2009 provincial budget protected health care spending, which allows the government to continue its work on this particular plan. We are investing \$1.1 billion in our aging at home strategy, which will provide supports and services to seniors to allow them to stay in their homes with dignity and independence. Our emergency room and ALC strategy and investments are helping to ease the pressure in our emergency rooms and freeing up acute-care beds.

We have increased funding to long-term care by over \$1 billion, providing \$300 million alone this year. We've opened up 7,712 new long-term-care beds and plan to open another 2,181 additional beds over the next three years. You can see clearly this government has been very active on this file.

We have funded 6,100 additional staff, including 2,300 nurses, which equates to 11.9 million more hours of hands-on care to the people in our health care system. Last year, we funded 1,200 registered practical nurses in Ontario long-term-care homes, ensuring at least one new nurse in every home. We've already invested \$23.5 million to provide 873 personal support workers. All of this was done to help ease ALC pressure in our hospitals.

We are making changes to the Long-Term Care Homes Act by providing more hours of services when needed, especially in the early weeks of care. We've also extended the extraordinary circumstances period from 30 days up to 90 days on an annual basis and unlimited care for individuals receiving palliative care or waiting for admission to long-term-care homes.

We are increasing service to Ontarians living with disabilities by investing close to \$120 million for assisted living services in supportive housing, which provides 24-hour access to on-site assistance for those living with disabilities, such as HIV/AIDS, brain injuries etc.

This Ontario government was the first government to make a significant multi-year investment in end-of-life care. We provide support today to over 30 residential hospices, including capital investment in at least 10 of those hospices. Through Ontario's \$150-million end-of-life care strategy, over 6,000 more Ontarians will receive compassionate, end-of-life care in their homes. At the same time, we're also implementing other strategies to help elderly Ontarians get the care that they absolutely need. This government has launched a groundbreaking aging-at-home strategy to meet the needs of the aging population in Ontario.

As part of our strategy to reduce ER wait times, we are increasing home care hours, personal support and home-making services by 50% and removing caps altogether for patients waiting for placement in a long-term-care home or receiving palliative care at home.

This government has been very active in this file, and I've got to tell you, in my opinion, our record speaks for itself because our investment over the last five years has

been significantly more than the previous two governments. Our investment is clearly helping to ease the pressure on our emergency rooms and freeing up those acute care beds that are needed for that service.

Our investment in home care has prevented more than one million emergency room visits and hospital stays since 2003.

This is a government that has moved health care forward in an era of no longer closing hospitals, where previously we had 31 hospitals closed while our population in Ontario was growing significantly. We are in the business of health care, we are in the business of bringing that health care that the public has asked us to deliver, and we are delivering it efficiently. Do we recognize that there's more work to be done? Absolutely. The Minister of Health has spoken on many occasions, recognizing that there's more work that this government has to do. He has launched many strategies to tackle that work, and we're moving forward with our plan that this government has been elected on to the people of Ontario. We're delivering better care, we're delivering that care closer to home and we intend to continue.

One thing that is very important to note is that we were the first government to enshrine public health care into law and make a commitment to the future of medicare. So this government has been very active in the health care sector.

It's unfortunate that my colleague from Parry Sound-Muskoka has actually moved this motion, but he has not really paid attention to what the government is doing. I must say that if he's looking for work particularly in his riding, the minister is quite open to sitting and discussing with him his particular issues. This government has certainly done a great job in the health care sector, and we will continue to do that throughout this particular mandate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: One of the things that you discover when you get into this chamber for the very first time is that you probably deal on a constituency level and bring to this place problems that pertain to health more than any other problem you can possibly encounter. Health-care-related issues become part of the daily routine very quickly and they are extremely notable because they are deeply personal, they usually involve people who are desperate and they are often sad because they are always about a loved one who needs something. In this particular case, the "something" is an acute care hospital bed. So I rise in support of the motion of my colleague from Parry Sound-Muskoka.

I must say that I can't comprehend how this government is unable to see the writing on the wall when it comes to acute care beds in Ontario. There's a multiple-level health care delivery system here that of course begins in this particular case with hospitals underneath those LHINs which are extremely costly to operate, the ministry, of course, and all of it is driven by a money cycle.

We have a new budget that's under consideration right now where health care as a function of the total is about 40%; it's gone from \$41 billion to about \$44 billion. All of that seems to result in insufficient progress because it's barely enough to even run in place. So the challenges faced by our province when it comes to acute health care are a result of this domino effect. Frankly, while I'm not in debate with my friend from Scarborough-Rouge River, I can't believe that I've just heard a six-minute defence of what the government is doing, because we're all in this together. This is about statistics, it's about facts, and what started with this government's lack of progress on delivering long-term care is resulting in longer wait times for acute care beds.

In my own riding, in York Central Hospital there are often wait periods, but what they have is two floors of long-term-care beds. There's a direct relationship between being able to secure the acute care bed that you want, or need, and the number of people who have to be accommodated in long-term care in the same facility. The latest statistics show that 25,172 people in Ontario are on long-term-care waiting lists. You can ask anyone about finding a long-term-care bed, especially without an advocate.

I know in my own case, dealing with my late mother, she went from level to level because she was always in an alternate level of care, and only ultimately received the long-term-care bed that she required because she had children who were in a position to advocate for her. So many people in her position, at an advanced age, in their eighties or nineties, don't have that advocate. Without it, you are at the mercy at the CCACs, and they can only do what they can do. In my particular case, the Central LHIN, which includes York region, has 2,085 people waiting for long-term care. That's the area that I represent, so it's of vital concern to me. Without appropriate facilities available to these Ontarians, where do you think they're going to stay? Where are they? Well, they're in acute care beds. They are forced to stay in our hospitals. Consequently, resources meant for acute care are increasingly diverted to patients who should be receiving care in appropriate facilities that offer a residential environment, security and a higher quality of life.

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But you know what? As my friend from Parkdale-High Park said, they're old. You start to say to yourself, "Does anybody really care?" Hence the need for advocates. The result: Hospitals are crowded, surgeries are delayed, Ontarians in need of immediate acute care are forced to wait—meanwhile, we're all getting older. I don't have to tell you that increased wait times means increased suffering—in far too many cases, suffering that's detrimental to the patient's health. Everybody here knows of individual cases—everybody—in their families, in their circle of friends.

To date, this government has turned a blind eye to the growing need for long-term-care beds, and this is an unforgivable omission. It's not something that we can debate; it's something that is statistically provable. It is

not a secret that the demographics are changing. It is not a secret that the number of seniors in this province is growing. That means that Ontario must address the shortage of long-term-care beds now in order to ensure that (a) people requiring alternative level of care have access to an appropriate environment, and (b) acute care services do not suffer.

York region, where my riding of Thornhill is located, is a part of this, and the growth that it's going to experience is going to take the population from 920,000 now to 1.3 million people by 2026. That's one third, again, in the next 15 to 16 years. York Central Hospital, the main hospital serving the catchment area, for example—it provides care to patients living in Richmond Hill, Vaughan, Markham, King, Toronto and other municipalities—has 116 long-term-care beds while we're looking for placement for over 2,000. Admissions—to give some statistical validity to this—for the 356 acute care, complex care and rehab beds in one year stood at just shy of 17,000, and the hospital was operating at a capacity of 93%—far above the recommended levels. And I note that my friend from Parry Sound–Muskoka has hospital statistics that demonstrate that it's basically at 100% in his area.

We have to do something about this now. A responsible government would recognize that, to meet the future needs of Ontario's communities, to meet the needs of my constituents in Thornhill, our province needs a comprehensive plan that will provide more long-term-care beds, more assisted-living beds for Ontarians with disabilities, improved access to living-at-home services and increased hospice and palliative care beds, as my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka is recommending, and that's why I support his motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Kuldip Kular: Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Mr. Miller's motion.

Prior to my election to this House in 2003, I worked as an emergency physician for about 15 years in one of the local hospitals in Brampton. As a physician and a member of this government, I am very pleased with our progress to relieve the congestion of our hospitals and our emergency departments. More work remains to be done, as always, but we have made excellent progress.

Health care in Ontario and throughout the world is an evolving sector, with more attention and resources being paid to the specific needs of patients in order that their needs are met and that, in a publicly funded system like ours, tax dollars are spent effectively.

Our strategy to address the issue of wait times and alternate-level-of-care pressures has already proven itself. We have identified wait times at specific facilities and for procedures and have seen improvements. We are collecting wait time information and are making targeted investments to bring wait times down. We have been working to reform our health care system since forming a government in 2003. More importantly, our plan is coordinated so that it can address not only the easing of

pressure on emergency rooms and the freeing-up of acute care beds, but improve many other areas of care.

Our growing investments in overall health care funding since 2003 now allow us to continue with our plan and to keep up with hospital funding.

Our government has increased spending in home care, long-term care and the aging-at-home strategy. We are ensuring that seniors can receive care closer to their homes with dignity and independence, and our plans are helping them manage chronic diseases at home. Our investments are working, easing the pressure on emergency rooms and freeing up acute care beds.

We are working hard to continue our progress by rebuilding 35,000 beds over the next 10 years. That's in more than half of the homes in this province.

We are the first province to fund insulin pumps for children with insulin-dependent types of diabetes. That makes our emergency room visits fewer and fewer.

We are increasing the hours of personal support and homemaking services.

We are working with the LHINs, CCACs and hospitals to establish best-care practices for ER and CCAC case managers, including hours of operation to ensure best utilization, with a goal of direct discharge to the home, and with the service supports when hospital in-patient or long-term-care home care is not required.

Standards for long-term-care homes are being restored, and homes face regular inspections.

Ontario has made lots of multi-year investments in end-of-life care.

From all this, I can say with confidence that our government has a plan, and our plan is working. It's definitely going to reduce wait times in emergency departments as well as free up acute care beds, providing Ontarians with the kind of care they deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I want to applaud my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka, who does an outstanding job on behalf of his constituents. In fact, I know that he does, because I'm a part-time resident of that community, and I know how well he looks after our family and our neighbours.

The issue that he has identified and the information that he has provided today address a very urgent need in this province. He is asking the government to "address the shortage of acute care beds in hospitals by providing alternatives for alternate-level-of-care patients which include"—and he's giving recommendations, and I applaud him for that.

He says that what needs to happen is we need to increase long-term-care beds and we need to increase assisted-living beds for Ontarians with disabilities. He says we need to improve access to living-at-home services, and we need to increase hospice/palliative care beds.

This is the truth. Any hospital in this province will tell you that as a result of the policy initiatives that have been introduced by this government, they are being forced to

shut acute care beds. In fact, this morning a message came through on my BlackBerry from a resident in Guelph whose surgery was being further delayed because that hospital, in an attempt to balance its budget, had been forced to close acute care beds, so this surgery now is going to be delayed for one more week. I can tell you, it is causing tremendous stress to this individual. This individual suffers from cancer and is already under stress, but this is a huge issue. My colleague has already pointed out that hospitals today are operating at levels of over 100%. As I say, there is no room at the inn. And if we ever had an outbreak such as SARS, I'll tell you, today it would be an issue that we would be unable to cope with. We simply wouldn't have the accommodation necessary to deal with those people who are suffering from SARS. These hospitals have been put in a very difficult position.

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I also want to mention that this is a new issue. We didn't have this problem before this government started to cut beds in hospitals, and it's as a result of their policy. What has happened is, not only have they reduced the number of acute level beds in hospitals; they're not building any new long-term-care beds or providing the funding necessary for home care or for assisted living. Whereas we built 20,000 new long-term-care beds and renovated 16,000 older beds, this government, since 2003, has never developed a plan. So today, no wonder we have people waiting in acute care beds in hospitals where they shouldn't be. It's because we have 25,000 people in this province who have need of a long-term-care bed but have nowhere to go.

In my own community, we've got about 1,500 people waiting for a long-term-care bed. As a result, in my community, Waterloo region, as of February 2009, we had 23% of the acute care beds in our hospitals at that time occupied by ALC patients. A few years ago this wasn't a problem, but the problem is worsening every year. The percentage of acute care beds occupied by ALC patients is increasing everywhere and that's what is creating the pressure. As a result, you have people who come in for surgery, there are no beds to accommodate them and the surgery is postponed. You have people who come into the emergency room and, again, there are long wait times in the emergency rooms because there are no beds to accommodate the people because they are occupied by alternative-level-of-care patients.

I support this motion brought forward by my colleague. I applaud him for bringing this to the attention of the government. Regrettably, it's an issue which they are failing to address. In fact, I listened to the members today, and you would think there wasn't a problem. I can assure them—I can give them the statistics—your own hospitals, whether you're in Toronto or Mississauga, are all facing pressure from these alternative-level-of-care patients who have nowhere else to go. I can tell you that your residents are suffering because their surgery is being delayed, and there are long waits in the emergency rooms as well. So I urge this government to support my colleague's private member's bill here today, because we

need to make sure our older residents live with dignity and respect.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Parry Sound—Muskoka has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you to all the speakers who've contributed to the debate this afternoon. I know that the member for Kitchener—Waterloo has a particular interest in the statistics from the West Parry Sound Health Centre. It seems she spends a little time around McKellar and Parry Sound, mainly in the summer months.

The statistics for West Parry Sound Health Centre from this year, for example, show that from August to December, the hospital has basically 100% occupancy; 40% of the beds are occupied by alternative-level-of-care patients, so people who really would be better served at home or at a long-term-care home. That creates all kinds of problems for the hospital to be able to balance its budget, to be able to deal with emergencies coming in and not have a backlog in the emergency department, to be able to schedule surgery, to be able to look after young mothers.

The member for Scarborough—Rouge River outlined many of the government's actions and programs that are in place. As well as meeting with the CEOs of the hospitals in my riding, I met with the interim LHIN chair for the North Simcoe Muskoka LHIN, and she outlined all the various programs the government does have in place. But despite those programs, things are getting worse. As the member from Thornhill said, it's not a secret. The demographics are changing. We're getting older. So this problem is going to get worse before it gets better if the government doesn't take action and try to deal with it in the ways that I have suggested.

As was pointed out earlier, on the east side of my riding, Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare, which has the Bracebridge and Huntsville hospitals, is facing a \$2.3-million deficit this year and has an accumulated debt of \$7 million, despite having amalgamated the hospitals and saving \$4 million. They won't be able to balance their budget unless they deal with this basic problem.

I thank all the members for speaking this afternoon. I hope you will support this resolution and help try to solve this problem in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): For those watching at home and those visiting us today here at Queen's Park, this item will be voted on in approximately 100 minutes.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Canada should ensure that Ontarians receive the same employment insurance benefits they would get if they lived elsewhere in Canada and should supplement employment insurance support for unemployed workers in the manufacturing sector by providing targeted resources and other supports.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Ms. Mangat moves private member's notice of motion number 80. Pursuant to standing order number 98, the honourable member has up to 12 minutes for her presentation.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: In 2008, the total employment insurance regular benefits per unemployed person in Ontario were \$5,490, whereas EI benefits were \$9,560 per unemployed person in other provinces. That means that unemployed workers in Ontario are getting, on average, more than \$4,000 less in employment insurance than they would get if they lived elsewhere in Canada—\$4,000 per year.

Less than 20 years ago, Ontario experienced a recession that cost us almost 350,000 jobs. It was a terrible time for families and residents of Ontario. Once again, Ontario now finds itself facing economic challenges that we all know are the outcome of the current global recession.

The clearest sign of the challenges we are facing can be seen through the number of jobs that are being lost. In February alone, Ontario saw the loss of 35,000 jobs. Across Canada, the total job losses are at almost 300,000.

In Ontario, the manufacturing industry is being hit the hardest. One of the industries suffering the most is the auto parts industry. Mississauga ranks second in Ontario for the number of the auto parts industry's manufacturing businesses. The auto parts industry has seen a decline in their sales over the past few months. Loss of sales leads to loss of jobs. This industry downturn is directly affecting the manufacturing companies in my riding.

Mississauga is also home to 52,000 businesses from different sectors. Many of these industries are also being affected by the current economic climate. My constituents work hard and they remain resilient in this unstable economic environment, but many of them are at risk of losing their jobs and many of them have lost their jobs already. I meet people every day who are struggling and are worried about losing their jobs and their survival. What is making them even more concerned is that the support they hope to rely on if they lose their job is not going to be there and it is not going to be enough. In spite of their hard work and resilience, Ontario workers are being shortchanged by Ottawa at a time when they need support the most.

1450

Statistics Canada reports that in December, Ontario had a 30% increase in the number of people receiving employment insurance from the same time in the previous year. Last week, it was reported that in January, Ontario had seen a 6.2% increase in EI recipients since December. What these numbers confirm is that Ontarians are losing their jobs and are turning to the system that should support them while they look for work. However, Ontario workers are not getting the full support they deserve, as compared to workers in other provinces.

Ontario workers account for 39% of the Canadian labour force. They pay their EI premiums just like every other Canadian worker. They're entitled, just like every other Canadian worker, to seek and receive the same EI

benefits. The federal government's employment insurance program is simply unfair to unemployed Ontarians. Across Ontario, the shortfall in EI benefits amounts to almost \$2.1 billion each year. That money would help parents who have lost their jobs to pay their mortgages, buy their groceries, buy gas for their cars and get the training they need to get back into the workforce.

For many years, these workers have seen their premiums used to support unemployed workers in other regions and sectors. Ontario workers need proportional support, yet the federal government refuses to act.

My resolution calls on the federal government to do two things. One, give unemployed Ontarians the same deal they would get if they lived elsewhere in Canada. This money would go to the workers, not to the government. Two, supplement EI support for unemployed workers in the manufacturing sector by providing targeted resources for training and other supports.

I believe that requesting a fair share of insurance from the federal government for Ontario workers and their families is the right thing to do and also the smart thing to do. Ontario workers deserve to be treated like every other Canadian worker, and not have their work devalued or shortchanged. There is absolutely no reason why an Ontario worker should get over \$4,000 a year less than workers in other provinces.

Fairness to Ontario is not an unreasonable request. The workers here pay their EI premiums just like workers in other provinces. In fact, Ontario taxpayers are contributing more to the federation than taxpayers in other provinces. So why is it that Ontario workers are given less?

As stated earlier, a large number of businesses in my riding of Mississauga—Brampton South and across Ontario are manufacturing in nature. They have taken the biggest hit. It is for that reason that I believe it is important to supplement EI support for unemployed workers in the manufacturing sector by providing targeted resources for training and other supports. Rather than short-changing workers in Ontario's manufacturing sector, they deserve help in transitioning into new jobs.

If Ontario was given its fair share of funding, we would receive an extra \$478 million each year to train our unemployed workers. This would significantly benefit the residents in my riding.

The people of Ontario deserve to be treated equally and fairly. They are facing hard times, just like the rest of Canadians. We cannot sit back and let our workers be treated unfairly. I cannot sit back and watch as more of my constituents are shortchanged. That is why I resolve to see that the government of Canada ensures that Ontarians receive the same employment insurance benefits they would get if they lived in any other part of Canada. The government of Canada should supplement employment insurance support for unemployed workers in the manufacturing sector by providing targeted resources and other supports.

My constituents want me to stand up for them. I hope that the rest of the members will stand up and support my

resolution, to fight for the rights of their constituents, as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm always pleased to respond to private members' bills. I commend the member for her passion for the people in her riding and indeed in Ontario.

In fact, our position is clearly on the record as being that we stand first and foremost for fairness. That's the most important thing. Each of us, I hope, would be working not just for our constituents, but for fairness. Fairness, in this respect, is something I can say that we would agree with—the member's motion. That is on the record. I'd like to talk about a lot of other things, because we've cleared that up. We support this: fairness for Ontario. That gives me a bit of liberty to go on to other things which I think will be important.

I want to spread the joy here a bit, if I can. The member from Hamilton East, Mr. Miller, introduced Bill 6, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000, to provide for an employee wage security program. This bill was discussed, like your bill here today, and passed. In fact, it was referred to the general government committee on December 6. I don't know one reason why they're blocking it. I can tell you, what this bill does—and it's been raised in the House here as recently as last week. With the tragedy of the economy—and I don't blame it all on Premier McGuinty; probably 50% of it, though.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Maybe 45%. But some great portion—

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, they're barracking.

If they're not responsible for the losses of jobs, they're not responsible for the gains. You can't have it one way and not the other. With the authority goes the responsibility, but also the glory. So when we see the economy going down rapidly, we can't blame Premier McGuinty for all of it. But he can't take credit if it turns around, either.

This recent budget is a good example of just throwing a lot of paint on the wall and hoping that some of it sticks. Nearly every statute has been amended, if you look at the bill—but I want to stay on topic here, to be fair.

Bill 6 really attempts—the other Mr. Miller—

Mr. Mike Colle: You have the wrong bill in front of you.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, no, Bill 6. She hasn't got a bill. It's a resolution.

Mr. Mike Colle: Her resolution—

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, it's not a bill, see? Mr. Colle, as a former minister, should know that, but then again he's not in cabinet anymore.

This one here “establishes the employee wage security program and provides for the appointment of a program administrator. Under the program, employees will be

eligible for compensation for certain types of unpaid wages.” Now, I think that's fair. Let's go back to the major theme here that we all agree on: fairness.

1500

The other day, Mr. Fonseca, the Minister of Labour, was asked a question, and he bobbed and weaved. Now, here's the interesting question. The question was asked by Mr. Miller on March 25—

Mr. Mike Colle: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mr. John O'Toole: He's just using up my time.

Mr. Mike Colle: The experienced member knows full well that what we have before us is a resolution by the member from Mississauga here, and he is talking about a bill that was before this House six months ago. That's my point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Yes. I think we do take a little more liberty on Thursday afternoon, private members' time, to fully hear the member, but I would ask him to heed the honourable member's comments and tie this together to the—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Sit down for a minute, please. Excuse me, member from Durham. One of us shouldn't be standing.

I'll watch your time. But do try and tie it back to the resolution from time to time.

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes. Thank you for that spurious interruption there. But I think the point that is being made here with Bill 6 does relate, because what we're really trying to do is get down to the root of fairness. Now, the question of how it does wrap back to the current resolution by the member from Mississauga–Brampton South is the following: Mr. Miller asked a question of the Minister of Labour, and this was on March 25. The Minister of Labour said, “The member's well aware that there is no subnational jurisdiction”—this is the minister's response—by the provincial government. It all belongs to the federal government. So the question was actually deflected, where he said that it's all the federal government's responsibility.

He went back to him in the supplementary and said, “The minister's comments are not exactly correct. The truth is that despite the real pain and suffering of so many workers and their families, we have a provincial government here that's refusing to act on an issue that is clearly—clearly, Minister—within your jurisdiction,” and he was referring back to Bill 6.

All we're trying to do is use whatever tools and resources the Minister of Labour can use. I understand he wants to deflect, as does—up until a few weeks ago, the Minister of Finance, Mr. Duncan, was referring everything to the federal government as their fault.

I'm going to put on the record—and let's correct the record here. It's very important that we get our numbers correct. I'm so disappointed, because on this resolution they are saying that we would not get \$4,000 more per year per person. In fact, in her remarks she said that it

would mean \$478 million for the province of Ontario to assist employees. I think we both agree with that. But here's what has happened: They're ignoring the facts. Somebody gave this resolution to her, I'm sure, really, because the information is here.

It says "labour market training program." The labour market training program is an agreement between the federal and provincial governments; the labour market agreement, it's called. That agreement allocates \$1.193 billion of new money to the province of Ontario from the federal government. They must have agreed, rather than changing the qualifying days for UI or EI, and that's what has happened. Federally, Ontario has a different waiting period—

Mr. Bob Delaney: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Stop the clock, please. The honourable member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, with the greatest of respect, standing order 23(e) states that a member shall not anticipate any matter already on the Orders and Notices paper for consideration, and I believe the member is trying to anticipate an event that has not yet occurred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): While that would normally be a point of order, I don't accept the argument. I listened carefully to the member. He is tying it back to the resolution. He is talking about employment statistics in the province and he's talking about the budget. So I'd ask the honourable member from Durham to continue.

Mr. John O'Toole: What the member from Mississauga—Brampton South is really asking for—let's keep track of it; let's not let it get too far off the regular road, the trail that we're all following to fairness—was equal treatment from the federal government. Clearly, it says that the federal government's EI program is unfair to unemployed workers in Ontario.

I'm a member of the opposition, and I'm trying to point out that her argument is not substantiated when you look at the evidence. I will be supporting the fairness debate, but her premise of the shortage of \$4,000 simply isn't there.

When you look at the last budget—this was the 2008 budget, not the 2009-10 that we're dealing with. The 2008 budget had \$3.5 billion in it. It was called the Second Career fund. The Second Career fund was made up of joint funding—federal and provincial. Do the homework. That agreement probably transposed the responsibility of changing the qualifying base. I would agree with you that the conditions of the economy have deteriorated rapidly in Ontario because we're a manufacturing-based economy. And there is, on our side, a full agreement and a full awareness to look at intercepting employees who have lost their jobs in partnership with the union, the employers and the individual, with the provincial government being there. Bill 6 is suggesting some of that kind of infrastructure. In fact, the NDP, a year and a half ago, when this economy started—the

thunder clouds were rolling in, asked for a jobs commissioner, which I think is to coordinate a very important theme that we hear every day and see every day in the papers: 300,000 jobs have been lost. Think of it. Almost half a million families are being crushed, rolled over, and they've got a plan here for transit, which is moving people around, but they have no plans for people.

This is a recurring theme. They make announcements: the Second Career opportunity thing, three-and-a-half billion dollars. I want a report from Mr. Milloy. How many people have actually filled out the 40-page application? These are people whose families are shaking, wondering how to make their mortgage payment, and we're putting up spurious arguments. In fact, in all fairness to the member, I think she was put up to it. As a matter of fact, there was a question today of the Minister of Labour about the nanny employees, which I believe, again, are false arguments. Most regulations with respect to employment for new Canadians have a great deal of federal responsibility about qualifications, licensing, permitting and legitimization. When I participate in these debates, I don't like to get personal, because I appreciate your passion in the commitment. I agree with it; I'm only pointing out that we should tack into some of this other money.

The money I referred to—and this is in the current budget, and I'm going to read it: The labour market program is \$1.193 billion. As a matter of fact, the federal transfer to the province is on page 96 of the current budget. It's pretty significant. They went from—the transfers; I can't believe it. We are being treated fairly. The tone here is changing, and I respect that. I think Premier McGuinty and Prime Minister Stephen Harper must have had coffee together or a latte or whatever. They must have had something together, because they are now in harmony. I think that Dwight Duncan, during the budget debate, complimented Jim Flaherty. These are positive developments. They have to work together. They've given them a ton of money, is what it is. It's \$19.2 billion—the federal government. When they announce these programs like the wait time strategy, federal money; Second Career, federal money. They're on the stage to get their picture taken, and the money came to the federal government.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: There's nothing wrong with it, but when you stand up here and blame the federal government for a shortfall of \$478 million, I would request—now, in fairness, this debate is usually recorded in Hansard, and Hansard is here—formally that the Minister of Labour stand in the House and tell us where he's spending this Second Career money, the \$1.193 billion. Is there a transitional plan where the government is going to take people into training, orientation, resumé development, career counselling? And I leave another question on the board: What are the jobs of the future for Ontario? What are the plans for these families? Everyone can't be a bus driver with this new transit money. Everybody can't work for the city of Toronto. What are the jobs of

the future? I don't hear or see a plan, except to blame the federal government. It's tragic.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's an honour to stand. I really commend the member for Mississauga-Brampton South for bringing in this motion. She's new to the chamber. We hear her voice, and she spoke forcefully. Of course, she's right. She's absolutely right; we're going to be supporting this motion. The only problem is, of course, that in the courageous stand she's taken, she's speaking out against the Liberal legacy federally, because, lest we forget, it was the Martin-Chrétien government that brought in the EI regime that we're working under right now. It was the Martin and Chrétien government that gave us the EI system that we have. Those are the facts, historical facts. I understand that Mr. Ignatieff is now doing some kind of manoeuvring around this issue, and I'll leave that to the member from Trinity-Spadina to elucidate upon. Certainly the tradition of Liberalism federally has been to basically take from the poor and give to the corporations. So there you go.

1510

I wanted to just take a minute to tell you about what is happening on the ground around this issue. The Good Jobs forum was kicked off in Parkdale-High Park several weeks ago to 200 people in the room. There were steelworkers, there was the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, there was Workers' Action there, among many others. We called for EI reform and we were very specific about what kind of reform we wanted, as well as equal pay for equal work. There's a concept. If you're doing the same job, whether you do it for two hours or 40 hours and have the same seniority, you should get the same pay. That's the situation in the European Union. That should be the situation here.

We also called for 360 hours to qualify for EI benefits. I hope the member will support that. We called for an increased benefit duration to at least 50 weeks in all regions—I hope the member will support that—and to provide an additional year of special extension benefits if national unemployment exceeds 6.5%, paid from federal government revenues. I hope the member will support that. Extend EI part I benefits while workers are in approved training and increase benefits to at least 60% of normal earnings, using the workers' 12 best weeks. This is what the labour movement is calling for across Ontario and across Canada. I hope the member will support the labour movement in doing just that, and I hope she will support the part that we can do something about in the province of Ontario, and that is our own employment standards work and bill. That needs serious amendment. It needs serious amendment, as the member from Durham talked about in terms of severance pay; he mentioned Bill 6. It needs serious amendment in terms of, as I said, the new call across Ontario, which is for equal pay for equal work.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I'm very pleased to speak on the resolution on employment insurance fairness for Ontario of my honourable colleague from Mississauga-Brampton South. There is no better time than now for this House to adopt this resolution. I hope that every single member of this House will stand for fairness for Ontarians.

From January 2008 to January 2009, southwestern Ontario saw the largest increases in employment insurance recipients across Canada. My home of Hamilton has not escaped this global economic downturn. As in all communities across Ontario, job loss has increased the need for EI. The statistics speak for themselves, and I'd like to share some statistics from Hamilton. In January 2008, approximately 7,000 Hamiltonians were receiving employment insurance. By January 2009, this number increased to just over 11,800. This represents a huge jump. In fact, it's more than 4,800 Hamiltonians. Unfortunately what this also means is that a total of 11,800 Hamiltonians will not—they will not—receive the same employment insurance benefits as their fellow Canadians. This is just not fair. Hamiltonians, like all Ontarians, work hard. They're a hardworking people and they deserve to be treated fairly. These 11,800 Hamiltonians will not receive the \$4,630 in benefits and supports as Canadians in other provinces do today.

On September 29, 2008, this House passed a resolution calling on the federal party leaders and candidates to outline their plan for fairness to our province. This included a call for Ontario's unemployed workers to receive the same benefits and supports as other Canadians outside of Ontario. Today we have the opportunity to reiterate an important part of our plan to help Ontarians. It is clear that we have a responsibility to ensure that Ontarians have equal opportunity within Canada to support themselves during this recession. Most importantly, we have a responsibility to ensure that when this recession is over, Ontario is even stronger than it was before. One of the best ways to do this is to provide a bridge for Ontarians while they upgrade their skills to compete in our new economy. This is especially true in the manufacturing sector.

Don Drummond, chief economist for TD Canada Trust, recognized that in the manufacturing sector, "This notion that you get laid off today and you find a job again tomorrow doesn't really ring very true." As a result, we must ensure that many Ontarians directly affected by this recession are able to find opportunity with the same support from all levels of government. That is why today I call upon the House to continue to press for EI fairness to Ontario and Ontarians.

I stand in full support of my honourable colleague from Mississauga-Brampton South.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? The honourable member for Trinity-Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I beg your pardon. I was looking for a Tory to stand up, but the 15 minutes were up. I forgot all about that.

I'm delighted to support this motion by the member from Mississauga-Brampton South; it's very timely. It's

good to see that the Tories are also supporting it—at least one Tory; I'm not sure about the others, but we'll see shortly. It's a good thing, but I was reminded by my colleague from Parkdale-High Park about the genesis of this particular problemo. The genesis of it happened during the reign of Monsieur Martin and Monsieur Chrétien, because they did this together a long, long time ago.

You might say, "But why go back so far? We should be looking forward, shouldn't we, rather than looking back?" But I enjoy looking back in history a little bit, because when we were in power in 1990, Mulroney whacked Ontario in such a serious way that it hurt. It hurt us as New Democrats, but it hurt Ontarians in particular, because we used to share—

Mr. John O'Toole: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I can't cite the standing order, but he must be talking about the resolution before the House, not back in 1988. I was brought to order on the same principle. I'd ask the member to stick to the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I appreciate your comments, but I think the honourable member from Trinity-Spadina has been addressing the resolution. Carry on.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thank you. I'm surprised that my colleague from Durham would just stand up and waste a few of my precious seconds that I have. How could you do that? It's all connected, and I will show you how it connects, obviously, because it all is interrelated.

So Mulroney whacked Ontario when they stopped sharing the welfare bill. It used to be 50-50, with Ontario sharing half and the federal government sharing half. Mulroney decided in 1990 to change that formula. While we had a serious recession starting in 1991-92, when we needed Mulroney the most, he wasn't there. He had a \$40-billion deficit—this is true; Mulroney did—left by Trudeau—and nobody remembers that, but that's another minor footnote in the history of politics. But what do Martin and Chrétien do? Well, they slashed even further. They got rid of the deficit on the backs of the unemployed: 40% of deficit reduction was due to the cuts they made in the then-called unemployment insurance benefits—40%. Understand, it was severe. This is Monsieur Chrétien and Monsieur Martin. Why talk about them, you say? For me, it's instructive, because we need to learn from it.

When you reduce the deficit by cutting on the unemployed, it's a serious, serious hurting on people who are most in need. So what did they do? They collected billions and billions of dollars from those who were working, but restricting the number and restricting the benefits of those who were paying into it. That was a Liberal regime that started it and continued with it for a long, long time. It was unfair then and it's unfair today.

1520

So you're right to be bringing this motion, but it's also proper that we identify who did what and who continues to harm the unemployed. And so, while we support this motion, we want you to look at what the federal Liberal

Party is doing at the moment. Monsieur Ignatieff, the most learned leader we've ever had—good heavens. Mr. Bob Rae said that he has probably written more books than the Tory caucus has ever read. While that may be true, I say to myself: What's the point of emphasizing the fact that this man has written so many books? Does that make him a good leader? I don't think so. Maybe; I don't know.

But if somebody said, "He's a good guy," I would say, "That's good." And if somebody said, "He really relates to human beings in a really nice way," I would say, "That's a good quality for leadership." And if somebody had strength and commitment and principles, I would say, "Yeah, I like that. That's a good quality." But to keep on saying that this man is the most learned man and, good God, once he gets into power, he's going to solve all these problems because he has seriously written thousands of books—I don't understand it. But that's beside the point. I'm not going to belabour that too much. It's beside the point.

We've got to talk to Ignatieff and say, "Iggy, where are you on this issue?" Because evidently—

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Mississauga, please. The member from Mississauga South, I think it is: Please calm down.

Just give him a call—he's close to you in terms of ridings; right?—and say, "Iggy, where are you on this?" Because evidently he doesn't have a position.

Federal New Democrats introduced a motion where they say they want every Canadian with 360 hours of paid work to qualify for employment insurance benefits. That's the motion that the federal leader of the NDP passed. Iggy said, "We support it in principle"—I think it's what he said—our learned individual. But when asked, "What would you do?", he said, "It's not my problem. It's the problem of the Conservative government." I understand that position, but if he's concerned about the unemployed and if he—

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: He supports it.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Who does?

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: We don't know what he supports; that's the problem. If he's got a strong commitment around something—Iggy, take a stand. Take a stand so that when we have people like someone from—an individual I read about. Here she is; a Whitby woman who has been laid off. She's a single mom. "I am still flabbergasted that I was only entitled to 26 weeks of EI after paying into it for 38 years," said Scott. The recent federal budget extended EI by five weeks...." and a letter went to Scott and she was so happy that she got five more weeks.

We're talking about human beings who are suffering, human beings who desperately need the support. What we have are benefits that have been restricted and benefits that have been cut over the years that affect thousands and thousands of people across Canada and indeed in Ontario.

The replacement rate for insured earnings was cut in 1996—that would be the Liberal government that I was referring to earlier; the federal Liberals—from 57% to 55%, itself the result of a cut from 60% in 1993, itself a cut from 66% in the 1970s.

As importantly, the level of maximum insurable earnings was frozen at \$39,000 for a decade, from 1996 to 2006, resulting in a frozen maximum weekly benefit of just \$413 per week. This freeze reduced the inflation-adjusted value of the maximum weekly benefit by one quarter.

Moreover, the effective income replacement rate for employment insurance is undercut by the two-week waiting period during which no benefit is paid, with an average claim lasting for about 20 weeks. This effectively reduces benefits by about 10%.

In 2004-05, the average regular weekly benefit paid was just \$315. Even the maximum benefit of \$413 was barely adequate to bring a single worker with no dependents to a poverty-line income in an urban centre.

So is this resolution timely? Of course it is. And are people paying huge amounts of dollars into employment insurance only to get so little back? Yes, it's a problem. People need and deserve adequate funding to stay out of the poverty rate. Those dollars need to be increased. It shouldn't take so long to qualify, and it shouldn't push so many people out. Ontario deserves better; you're absolutely right. I urge the members who know Iggy—M. Ignatieff, your federal leader—to take a strong position: "Forget about the books you've written. Be strong, be clear and be bold, and support your Liberal colleagues here in Ontario."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to the resolution of the member for Mississauga–Brampton South. I am speaking today on behalf of my constituents in Don Valley West, who are in need of support that is fair when compared with the support that people across the country get. I will warn the House in advance that I am going to talk about employment insurance—unemployment insurance, as it used to be called—and how it has evolved over the years, because I think it's important when we look at what's happening today. I know the member for Trinity–Spadina has gone down this road a little bit, although he didn't go back as far as I'm actually going to.

If we look at the realities of employment insurance, or unemployment insurance—it's been called various things—we have to go back to 1934. We have to look at a time when the government of Canada began to put in place some insurance for some people who found themselves without work. In the 1940s—I think it was in 1941—there was a nationally coordinated effort put in place to take some responsibility at the federal level for ensuring that people who were without jobs, as a transitional thing, would get some money. That was the beginning.

Then there were overhauls. I know the member for Trinity–Spadina has talked about the changes that have been made over the years, whether in 1971 or 1996. I think what we have to recognize is that governments over the years have made changes to respond to their dynamic fiscal situation when there has been a downturn in the economy or when there has been a regional need. I'm going to come back to that, because I think that regionality is one of the things that has gotten us into this situation, and we need to look at the regional needs, particularly of Ontario.

My colleague from Mississauga–Brampton South talked about the manufacturing sector. I think that what is happening right now in the manufacturing sector is analogous to what has happened to other industries in other parts of the country at different times in our history. So we need to come back to that if we're going to find the resolution.

The unemployment insurance system has expanded and contracted, depending on economic circumstances. It has contracted and expanded in terms of total, absolute dollars, and it has expanded and contracted for certain people in certain parts of the country because of that particular industry or that particular region, whether we're talking about fishing or forestry, whatever you're talking about across the country. Now we're talking about manufacturing in Ontario.

The manufacturing capacity in Ontario is changing, and it's changing in all parts of the province. There are certain parts of the province, obviously, that are being hit more severely than others and certain industries within manufacturing that are being hit more severely. What we need from the federal government is recognition that EI policy must evolve and adapt to local and global circumstances. That dynamic has to be evolutionary, and the history of EI demonstrates that it has been dynamic. So it is not a new thing that we would be saying, "Do you know what? Right now, we need an adjustment. We need to recognize the reality in Ontario."

The federal government needs to understand that that's been the history of EI. That's been the history it has been built on, and it speaks to who we are as Canadians. We understand that this country is made up of disparate realities across the country. We know that there are different climates, different industries, different capacities. At this particular point in our history in this country, Ontario, because of its diminished manufacturing capacity, needs this immediately. We need that fairness.

I look to the whole House to be supporting the resolution, and I thank the member for bringing it forward.

1530

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm pleased as well to be able to add my support to the member from Mississauga–Brampton South on the resolution before the House.

Many folks have spoken to the history of employment insurance or unemployment insurance, whichever you wish to call it. As it stands now in Ontario, only one

quarter of the people who are currently unemployed qualify for employment insurance. There's no question that in the past when a formula was put in place, it was put in place during terms of high employment. So there are regional disparities, and certainly today we are in another case; we are in high unemployment. So we need to look at those adjustments and we need to look at the fairness. Whether it's province to province or really whether it's just region to region, the fairness must be there. There are manufacturers who have lost jobs in Windsor, but there are manufacturers who have lost jobs in Toronto, Ajax, Pickering, Windsor, Scucog—any number of places.

What we want to be able to do is not only look at the number of hours that you qualify for and the number of weeks you're paid out, but we also need to look at some of the terms and conditions. For example, with the previous government they actually cut about 79% of the training and apprenticeship programs in this province. We've reinstated the apprenticeship and training programs. We put a significant amount of money to help unemployed workers get back into the workforce. Currently, the rules state that if you accept employment insurance, you must be actively looking for work, and if employment is available, then even if you're in a training program, you must drop out and take that job. That sort of defies the whole idea around why we have training for people to proceed with a different career in their life.

Today you don't work for just one company; you may, over your whole career, work for five or six different companies. Employment insurance is supposed to be a safety net for those who are unemployed during those transition periods. So we need to be able to look at that as well.

The differences amongst the different regions are also very significant. As I indicated, even here in Ontario we have car manufacturers and people who are losing manufacturing jobs, assembly jobs in southwestern Ontario. Currently, the way it stands in Windsor, for example, the hours you need to qualify are 525; the minimum number of weeks of benefits is 21 and the maximum is 45. There is a significant unemployment problem. But if you go to Newfoundland, you only need 420 hours to qualify, and you get a minimum number of benefits for 37 weeks and the maximum number of benefits is 45 weeks.

But I could go right back just to the differences in Scucog and Brock. They still have the same problem with unemployment but they need 665 hours to qualify. The minimum weeks of benefits is 15 and the maximum is 38. So you can see that there are huge disparities across this province.

As I indicated before, we were in a time when there was employment; the formula was there. We're now in a time of recession, and the formula needs to be changed. I'm more than prepared to support—as we move forward, this impacts and affects forestry workers, manufacturing, any number of deficits that are occurring in a number of regions across this province and actually, to be honest with you, Mr. Speaker, right across this country.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Mississauga–Brampton South, Ms. Mangat, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I would like to thank the member from Hamilton Mountain, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Natural Resources, the member from Durham, the member from Trinity–Spadina and the member from Parkdale–High Park for their insightful comments.

As I stated earlier, Ontario workers account for 39% of the Canadian labour force. They pay their employment insurance premiums just like every other Canadian worker, and just like every other Canadian worker they are entitled to seek and receive the same EI benefits, yet Ontario workers get \$4,000 less each year than the workers in other provinces.

I want to see the families and the victims of this current global economic recession in my riding get back on their feet, and they need help. They are good citizens. They are working hard and paying their taxes. During these difficult times, they need help from the federal government, and the government of Canada has the power to help our workers and provide them proportional support. They pay taxes like any other Canadian worker.

In 2008-09, there were three net contributors to the federation: Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. British Columbia paid \$2.7 billion, Alberta paid \$14.3 billion, and Ontario contributed \$23.5 billion—the largest contributor to the federation and a proud contributor. I fail to understand why—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you to the honourable member. Sorry, but your time had expired.

We'll vote on this ballot item in about 50 minutes.

HAWKINS GIGNAC ACT (CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS), 2009

LOI HAWKINS GIGNAC DE 2009 (DÉTECTEURS DE MONOXYDE DE CARBONE)

Mr. Hardeman moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 143, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992 to require carbon monoxide detectors in all residential buildings / Projet de loi 143, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1992 sur le code du bâtiment pour exiger l'installation de détecteurs de monoxyde de carbone dans tous les bâtiments servant à l'habitation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Oxford, pursuant to standing order 98, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you, and I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 143, which is also known as the Hawkins Gignac Act. This bill would protect lives and prevent tragedies, through requiring working carbon monoxide detectors in every home in Ontario.

I want to thank all the people who are here today to support this bill. I particularly want to recognize the members of the Hawkins family who have come from North Bay and are in the west members' gallery: Debbie, Pam and Kayla. I can only imagine how difficult this loss has been for you and your family, and I want you to know that our thoughts and prayers and those of the community are with you.

Late last year, Richard, Laurie, Cassandra and Jordan Hawkins succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning. It was later discovered that their gas fireplace had a blocked exhaust and had filled their home with a poisonous gas. I'm honoured that their families allowed me to name the bill in the memory of the Hawkins family.

Richard Hawkins, Debbie's son, was a talented hockey player in the OHL and later shared the love of hockey with others by coaching the local hockey team. His young son, Jordan, shared that passion for hockey and was already demonstrating a sense of responsibility as a paper boy. Fourteen-year-old Cassandra was in grade 9 at St. Mary's High School and was part of the social justice club. The ribbons we are wearing here today are in memory of the family, and they're purple, Cassandra's favourite colour.

Richard and Laurie Hawkins—previously Laurie Gignac—were from North Bay, but after they moved to southwestern Ontario, they made Woodstock in Oxford county their home, and they became a very important part of our community.

As an OPP community relations officer, Constable Laurie Hawkins touched the lives of many people throughout Oxford. This is shown by the representatives from Big Brothers Big Sisters who worked with Laurie, and they are here, again in the gallery. It is shown by the many students in the public gallery up at the top there. Laurie taught the VIP program: values, influences and peers. She opened up to them and shared stories about herself and her family to help give them self-confidence and the knowledge they needed to make good decisions. Years after being part of the VIP program, students mentioned to their teachers the great impact that Laurie had on them.

The students who are here today from Victory Memorial School in Ingersoll are demonstrating their values and dedication by making the ribbons that we are all wearing today to honour the Hawkins family. I want to thank them and their teacher Lori Vollmershausen for being here today.

1540

I want to recognize Laurie's OPP colleague who is in the gallery: Sergeant John Rutkauskas. Anyway, John knows who he is. Laurie played a meaningful and significant part, and it was a great loss to the department.

There are also two firefighters from Woodstock Professional Fire Fighters Association here today, Trevor Ford and Brad Cullen, to honour the memory.

In honour of the Hawkins family, the fire department distributed carbon monoxide detectors in our community and worked hard to try and prevent more tragedies. I want to commend them for their work.

Firefighters and fire departments across Ontario have done their part to raise awareness about the need for carbon monoxide detectors in all homes. As a former firefighter, I know that often they are the first to witness tragedy. I want to thank them for all their efforts to protect and save lives.

Patrick Burke, the Fire Marshal of Ontario, said in a recent letter, "The fire service has always understood, first-hand, the importance of having early warnings and the tragedies related to carbon monoxide poisoning." That is why I am pleased that Dave Thomson, Bill Burns and Willie Gregg from the Fire Fighters Association of Ontario are here today to support this bill. I want to thank them for their assistance and the assistance of their association.

In a recent letter, Dave Thomson said, "The Fire Fighters Association of Ontario fully supports your private member's bill, the Hawkins Gignac Act of 2008 ... making carbon monoxide detectors mandatory in homes across Ontario."

Sadly, the Hawkins family is not the only tragedy due to carbon monoxide. Between 2001 and 2007, 74 people died in Ontario due to carbon monoxide poisoning. In fact, it is the number one cause of accidental poisoning deaths in North America.

Only last week in Thamesville near Chatham, a 71-year-old man died from carbon monoxide poisoning caused by his furnace, and over the past few months there have been many more tragic stories—a couple in Markham, a woman near Sudbury and many people who ended up in the hospital like the Toronto family in December. In fact, a British Columbia health organization estimated that each year 13,000 Canadians have some level of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Carbon monoxide is produced any time a fuel is burned. There are many sources of carbon monoxide in our homes: furnaces, water heaters, stoves and fireplaces, just to name a few. As we take steps to make our homes more airtight to save on heating costs, our risk of carbon monoxide poisoning increases. What makes it so dangerous is that carbon monoxide is tasteless, odourless and colourless, and there is no way to detect it before it starts to make people sick.

To protect lives, every house with a fuel-burning appliance or attached garage should have a working carbon monoxide alarm on every floor, but today, there are too many homes without one. Currently, only houses built after 2001 are required to have carbon monoxide detectors. That means that there are too many homes in Ontario where people are at risk; this is despite the fact that we have so many tragedies in Ontario, despite the fact that coroners' juries have recommended that legislation be changed to make carbon monoxide detectors mandatory—such as the jury in Sudbury that investigated four deaths due to carbon monoxide poisoning and recommended seven years ago that legislation be introduced to make them mandatory in all homes.

Three weeks ago, Dr. Andrew McCallum, the chief coroner of Ontario, released the results of an investi-

gation into the death of an 84-year-old woman in Sudbury. Working with the Technical Standards and Safety Authority, he confirmed that the source of the carbon monoxide was the fuel-burning boiler system, but there were no mechanical defects with the boiler system. Efforts to make the home more airtight simply caused the air flow to reverse and the gas to fill the home. As a result, the chief coroner made two major recommendations: that members of the public have their fuel-burning appliances inspected regularly to ensure they are in safe and proper working order, and that carbon monoxide alarms be installed on every level of all homes.

This bill would meet that requirement and make our homes safer by requiring carbon monoxide detectors in all homes in Ontario. The Hawkins Gignac Act is modelled on the regulations which make smoke detectors mandatory. For new homes, carbon monoxide detectors would have to be hard-wired and interconnected. We recognize that this would be cost-prohibitive in existing homes, so for these homes a battery-operated or plugged-in carbon monoxide detector would be acceptable.

Carbon monoxide detectors range in price, but there are models available for \$20 to \$25—not a high price to pay to protect our lives. I know that people across Ontario have accepted the importance of having smoke detectors on every level of their homes. I hope that we can make people aware of the need for the same with carbon monoxide alarms.

Currently, many people install one detector in each house and believe that this is enough to protect them, but the reality is that you need one on every level of your home, especially near sleeping areas. Lower levels or the early stages of carbon monoxide poisoning have flu-like symptoms: tiredness, headaches, dizziness, nausea and vomiting. The natural reaction for most people when you think you're getting the flu is to go to bed. Imagine that the carbon monoxide is coming from a heater or fireplace on the second floor directly into the bedrooms and the carbon monoxide detector is two floors away, in the basement near the furnace, or that the gas is coming from your attached garage or a stove in the kitchen. Even if the alarm goes off, it may not be loud enough to hear that far away.

I received a letter from a man in St. Catharines who put it very well. He said, "I want to express my strong support for making carbon monoxide detectors mandatory. I have a carbon monoxide detector on each level of my two-storey house even though I maintain my furnace. I just don't want to take any chances."

I've been pleased at the number of people who have recognized the importance of this bill, such as Greg Nicol, a fire prevention inspector in Owen Sound, who said, "I support your initiative for making carbon monoxide detectors mandatory in all homes with fuel-fired appliances or attached garages in Ontario."

I also want to thank the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association for supporting this bill. In a recent letter they said, "As first responders, our members are acutely aware of and have witnessed numerous accounts

of the effects, sometimes tragic, that carbon monoxide poisoning has had on our citizens. The OPFFA executive board has reviewed Bill 143 and is pleased to support your efforts to make carbon monoxide detectors mandatory."

I also want to thank them for meeting with me to discuss what we can do to increase awareness and strengthen this bill. They suggested some good amendments, and I hope that we are able to take this bill forward to committee to hear from groups like theirs to ensure that this bill will be as effective as possible.

They also explained to me why this bill would help protect all our firefighters. Imagine that emergency personnel have been told there is a medical call. Someone is unconscious, and it is assumed that it is simply a health issue, but in fact the house is full of carbon monoxide and this person is suffering from the effects. The firefighters are walking into the house unaware, with no warning. Having an alarm in the house might not only save the homeowner, but it could protect our emergency personnel.

While there have been many tragedies, I have also received letters from a number of people whose lives were saved by the carbon monoxide detectors that have convinced me even more that we need to pass this bill and ensure that more people are protected. I would ask everyone listening here or at home to take steps to protect yourself and your loved ones. If you don't have carbon monoxide detectors, get them. If you do have them, test them and make sure they're working, and if they're over 10 years old, replace them. Talk to your friends and neighbours about how this inexpensive piece of equipment can save lives. We have lost too many people to tragic accidents. Too many have had their bright futures cut short. Working together, we can raise awareness and move this bill forward to committee to ensure that we can prevent more tragedies in the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me this opportunity to present this bill to the Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's an honour to rise in support of Bill 143, which the member from Oxford has brought forward.

First of all, let me give to the families and friends of the Hawkins family our deepest condolences from the New Democratic Party for your loss. Hopefully this will be the beginning of trying to bring something out of that tragedy that is, in some small way, a triumph. So thank you for coming down today, making the trek, and hopefully we'll have some good news for you at the end of the afternoon.

I also want to acknowledge the member from Brant, who today got up and introduced a private member's bill—I'm a big fan of the member from Brant—about making a week in September a week to recognize the dangers of carbon monoxide. With all due respect, though, I have to say that that's not enough. Just setting aside a week to recognize the dangers of carbon

monoxide is not enough and will not be enough to save lives. But certainly, if Bill 143 is brought in, that would be a huge step forward, because then not only new houses but all houses would be covered under this bill and would be required to have carbon monoxide detectors up and operative.

This is a personal issue for me too, because before I was a politician I was a United Church minister, and early on, coming to Toronto and accepting a charge, we moved into a rental house. It was the first house, I have to say, that had a carbon monoxide detector in it. I had never seen such a thing before. We really didn't know anything about carbon monoxide or the possibilities of carbon monoxide poisoning. Then one day it started beeping, and like some of the stories that I've read in doing research for this bill, we thought there was something wrong with the detector. We turned it off, and it kicked back in; it started beeping again. I thought, "I don't really know what this is about but maybe we should phone the fire department, just in case," feeling a little embarrassed, actually, thinking that they'll come and it'll be nothing. It will just be a faulty detector. Certainly, we could smell nothing; we detected nothing in the house.

1550

This is so typical of what families go through and have gone through. The fire department was there, as usual, in minutes. Within minutes more, the entire street was cordoned off. That's how bad it was. It was a real wake-up call to us as a family. Had we not done that, had we not had the carbon monoxide detector operative and working in our house—who knows? My two children were in the house at the time, my husband, myself, our animals. We're just very glad that we had one, and it was unfortunately not due to our own awareness. So hopefully with Bill 143, more people will become aware. Certainly, even talking about the bill in this place, as people watch from home, will make people more aware so that we can prevent the tragedies that clearly you, who are visiting today, have lived through.

They're not alone. These are a few of the tragedies that have just happened this year because of carbon monoxide poisoning. An 84-year-old woman from Azlida lost her life on January 5 when the air flow on her furnace reversed. Thankfully, her daughter was rushed to hospital and survived. Adrianus Van Ravenstein and his son Michael died of carbon monoxide poisoning in their Kingston home on November 23. Ang Chindemi and her family, including her four-and-a-half-year-old grandchild, only just survived in hospital after the fans to dry their flooded basement blew out their furnace pilot light in their Toronto home. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of St. John's, Newfoundland, Martin Currie, was rushed to hospital this past New Year's Day when he was found semiconscious in his bed. That was due to a part of the liner in his chimney breaking off and partially blocking the chimney, causing his furnace to backfire, and so on and so on.

We know that the London fire department alone receives more than 800 carbon monoxide calls a year.

According to Deputy Fire Chief Dan Oldridge, they've had a few close calls. According to the Canada Safety Council, there were more than 12,000 calls related to carbon monoxide concerns in Ontario—12,000 other families who experienced what my family experienced. The BC Poison Control Centre says that in 2004, 121 people were poisoned by carbon monoxide in that province alone.

As the member for Oxford detailed, unfortunately, rather than decreasing, the numbers of these incidents are increasing. The thought is—although the research is not complete—it's because our houses are more energy-efficient now, more airtight. So it makes them, in a sense, more dangerous if they don't have carbon monoxide monitoring.

I was very pleased that the member for Oxford also gave a little bit of a caveat at the end of introducing his bill, and that was: It's not just enough to have a carbon monoxide detector in your house; it has to be working. I know that there are many across the province of Ontario, and certainly the fire departments know this, that have fire detectors that aren't working for want of a battery. I know that there are many more probably that don't have carbon monoxide detectors working for want of a battery—a battery that could have meant the difference between life and death.

So this bill is absolutely critical. It was quite shocking to me when I first saw the bill that this wasn't the case already in the province of Ontario, that this wasn't the law already. Certainly, it needs to be acted on, and it needs to be acted on quickly.

Again, our family were pretty typical folk who felt we're pretty aware—we are aware of what is going on—and we had never, until that moment, in a rental house, understood about carbon monoxide, its dangers, and what a detector could do about those dangers.

Certainly I applaud the member for Oxford. I would plead with the government—they alone, of course, if you understand the way that this place works, can bring this into law. We in the opposition can make suggestions, we can bring in private members' bills, we can hope they get through first and then even second reading sometimes, but almost all of them die in committee. Almost all of them do not see the fruition of becoming law unless and until the government brings them in as their own. Sometimes we get lucky. I often characterize this place as pushing an elephant uphill because sometimes in the opposition you make a lot of noise about issues, bring in private members' bills, get campaigns going, put in a lot of effort, only to budge the elephant of government up about an inch. In this case, we need that inch. Certainly, Ontario families need it. Certainly, in this case we hope the elephant walks on its own and brings in this law. All they have to do is not only pass it today but ensure that it gets to committee and ensure that it gets out of committee and back here onto the floor of the Legislature.

I'm sure the member from Oxford is like myself and other members of the opposition: As long as it gets passed, I'm sure, Ernie, you wouldn't mind if the govern-

ment put their stamp on it. But we need it passed and we need a whole lot more than just a week in September where we acknowledge the dangers. We know the dangers. Nobody knows the dangers better than our visitors today. I want to commend the children, by the way, for making these wonderful bows. This is quite a feat. Thank you for being so active. We always speak in this House about wanting our children and youth to be more politically conscious and more politically active, because you can make a difference, and your being here does make a difference. So thank you for all the hard work that you put into this and thank you for being here to support the member from Oxford in this noble effort.

My hope, and the hope of the whole New Democratic Party, is that it's not just an effort; we hope that this becomes law. Thank you, the member from Oxford, again, for pleading with the government that they not only say nice things about the bill and not only pass it today, but actually either pass it in its entirety or bring in their own bill in no short order that will do exactly the same thing. We need that and the province of Ontario needs it. It's the only fitting tribute to this incredible family and these incredible folk who have come down today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I'm pleased to stand and offer my support for Bill 143, put forward by the member from Oxford. He is to be applauded for his bill, as there's little doubt that, should it be passed, the legislation would save lives. Our government is committed to increasing public safety in Ontario. That's why we've developed tough building code and fire code standards. In fact, carbon monoxide detectors were first included in the Ontario building code back in 1993. We recognize that carbon monoxide poisoning has become the number one cause of accidental poisoning in North America. In 2001, the building code was amended to require carbon monoxide detectors in all suites of residential occupancy where there's a source of carbon monoxide, such as a gas furnace or a gas appliance. The requirements cover both houses and multiple-unit residential buildings.

Across Ontario, a number of municipalities have passed bylaws, based on advice from their fire professionals, requiring carbon monoxide detectors in dwellings, often using the authority to pass property standards bylaws set out in the Building Code Act, 1992. These municipalities include my own community of Brampton and the cities of Mississauga, Toronto and Oshawa.

For years now, the Ontario fire service has been championing public safety. They have asked that all residents be protected by carbon monoxide alarms. Many fire departments have enacted local bylaws that prescribe CO alarms in all residential buildings in which occupants are at risk of exposure to the poisonous CO gas. In fact, in my home municipality of Brampton, many residents have benefited from the protection of a CO alarm since 1998, when the fire department saw the need for these alarms and took action to have council pass a bylaw to protect its residents.

Residents often have questions about what type of alarm to buy to install in their homes. The fire service has been vocal in telling us that it's important to look for a CO alarm that conforms to Canada CSA-6.19, the standard for residential carbon monoxide alarming devices, or the Underwriters Laboratories standard number 2034, the standard for single- and multiple-station carbon monoxide alarms. By adhering to those standards, a homeowner can take some comfort in knowing that the carbon monoxide alarm has been manufactured in such a manner as to provide the maximum amount of protection.

1600

I introduced my first private member's bill, back in 2004, on the issue of residential fire sprinklers. I worked hard to support fire chiefs from across Ontario who had petitioned our government, asking for the power to ensure that sprinklers are installed in all new residential construction. On June 18, 2008, our government filed a regulation to increase the fire safety of new large residential buildings. As of April 1, 2010, all new residential buildings over three storeys high will require residential fire sprinkler systems.

Applause.

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: Thank you.

Private members' bills, as was mentioned earlier, give all elected members in this House the ability to significantly raise awareness on an issue. This bill attempts to amend the building code in order to save lives, and I support the principle of what the member is putting forward. But one of the benefits of debate in this forum is the opportunity to offer constructive criticism, which I will do in order to assist the member from Oxford, should the bill make it to committee.

One of Mr. Hardeman's initial criticisms of my sprinkler bill was the issue of maintenance. I note it now, as I see that in Bill 143 he has not addressed the maintenance of CO alarms, and I hope he'll consider that, should it get to committee. As well, requiring retrofits of all existing residential units could set a precedent for future retrofits. He might want to address that. Municipalities also may not be willing partners, since they may see this legislation as being a potential financial cost, as well as the difficulty in being able to enforce such an amendment. Lastly, the 12-month time frame provided within the bill to comply with the legislation may just be too short to ensure its success.

Having been a firefighter for 25 years, I know the member from Oxford appreciates anything that government can do to make society safer. I commend MPP Hardeman's efforts in introducing a bill that, like my sprinkler bill, would save the lives of countless Ontarians. I'm happy to lend my support to Bill 143 and will support it when it comes to a vote.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm certainly pleased to support the bill that has been put forward by my colleague the member for Oxford. This is a bill that, it appears, everyone in this House is going to support, and people are putting forward considerations to ensure that

any issues that might be outstanding are going to be addressed.

This bill would amend the Building Code Act, 1992, to require carbon monoxide detectors in all residential buildings. I want to commend and congratulate the member for Oxford. I know that at the time when the tragedy occurred, he did speak to it in this House, and he subsequently did follow up with this private member's bill. I also want to extend my sincere sympathy to the members of the family who are present today, and to thank them for all their hard work in making sure that this private member's bill was brought to the attention of this House today. I thank, as well, the students who have made these wonderful ribbons for us.

Oftentimes young people will ask me, "How does legislation originate? How does it start?" I think this is a good civics lesson. It often occurs because you have a situation, as occurred in the province of Ontario, where a family—in this case, Richard, Laurie, Cassandra and Jordan—died tragically inside their Woodstock home of carbon monoxide poisoning and, as a result, the family and friends wanted to make sure that something was done in order that other families would not suffer a similar fate. So the member from Oxford had the opportunity to introduce a bill, and here we are today.

This bill has come from you, the citizens in the province of Ontario, and you're here to make sure this House supports this bill today and that it can go on to committee, if need be, and be passed by this House, hopefully as soon as possible. It is a very important bill, and I can certainly attest to the fact that carbon monoxide poisoning is not something you cannot consider to be serious. We've had a family friend—fortunately, they were spared the consequences, but they could have met a very tragic end, and so, several years ago, my husband took it upon himself to purchase detectors for the three levels of our home. He continues to monitor faithfully and make sure they're all in working order. It's regrettable that it sometimes takes personal tragedies and situations to make us take action, but if this bill was passed, everyone in this province would be obligated to put a detector in their home, and we could ensure there were no further tragedies as we move forward.

Again, I congratulate Mr. Hardeman. I know this issue is certainly one he wishes to move forward as quickly as possible. Again, I applaud the family members and friends who are here today, who have done what they can in memory of the family, and I thank the students. This is how legislation and bills are brought forward and passed in this House, because of you, the people in this province. We try to respond to what you believe are needs, and of course this is a need that needs to move forward very, very quickly.

Thank you all for your participation in bringing this bill to us today. We hope, as a result of the discussion today, that we will have raised the awareness of all the people in the province of Ontario. I hope that, as a result of the discussion here today, those who are watching at home, or any subsequent media attention this debate will receive—I hope there are people tonight or tomorrow or

this weekend who will recognize that they should go out and buy detectors for all levels in their homes in order to avert future tragedies.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'd like to thank the member for Oxford for bringing forward this important bill, and I want to tell him and those present today that I'm going to support his bill.

I know that the member for Brant has indicated his support for the bill to the member from Oxford. On behalf of the member of Brant, I just want to say that John and Sandy Gignac are here to support the bill. In fact, they're spearheading action in the riding to educate the public about this issue.

Carbon monoxide, or CO, as it's known by its chemical name, is colourless, odourless, tasteless and poisonous. It is, in fact, the most common cause of fatal poisoning in many countries. Carbon monoxide consists of one molecule of oxygen covalently bonded to one molecule of carbon, hence its abbreviated name, CO. It's produced from the partial oxidation or, in layman's terms, the incomplete burning, of carbon-containing components. If there's not enough oxygen present to completely burn carbon, then CO forms in preference to the more usual carbon dioxide. Carbon monoxide gas is quite flammable, burning in air with a characteristic blue flame, and of course producing carbon dioxide.

The typical average background level in homes is about 0.5 to 5 parts per million. Near a gas stove that is properly adjusted, that level could be 5 to 15 parts per million. In a big city in traffic, that level could approach 10 times that. The chimney of a home fireplace can read a stunning 5,000 parts per million. Just to put some scale on that, undiluted warm car exhaust without a catalytic converter is 7,000 parts per million. Having CO detectors can save more than human lives, especially in farm country.

Operating a CO detector is simplicity itself. You buy it, you put a battery in it, you attach it to a wall or ceiling and that's it. The only downside I've observed is that the battery only fails between the hours of 2 and 4 in the morning on a weekday. Why, for example, would anyone in farm country with a fireplace in the house not want to have a CO detector? If vehicles routinely park or idle outside the barn, why would you not want to have a CO detector to determine if your livestock is exposed to high levels of carbon dioxide?

What happens when CO levels build up in the air and people or animals breathe that air? Carbon monoxide inhibits the blood's ability to carry oxygen to body tissues, including vital organs such as the heart and the brain. When you inhale CO, it combines with the oxygen-carrying hemoglobin of the blood to form carboxyhemoglobin.

1610

Interjection: Oh.

Mr. Bob Delaney: That's a mouthful. Once combined with the hemoglobin, that hemoglobin is no longer available to transport oxygen.

The half-life of carboxyhemoglobin is approximately five hours. That means that for a given exposure level, it takes about five hours for the level of carboxyhemoglobin in the blood to drop to half of its exposure level.

The symptoms of CO poisoning, as the member said, resemble those of the flu. In fact, a misdiagnosis of the flu often means delayed or missed treatments. At high concentrations, the symptoms appear more quickly. Look for a person's face turning cherry pink, a fact pointed out to me by the member for Oak Ridges–Markham and the former York region medical officer of health.

The hardware is cheap, the operation is simple and the benefits are obvious and tangible. This is a bill about the real reason that people send each of us to the Ontario Legislature: to make things better in ways great and small. Let's all vote for Bill 143 and make it law.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a real pleasure to get up today and pay respect to the people who are here.

I just want to start by saying that I have a great deal of respect for the member from Oxford, Mr. Hardeman. Just given his background, there's no surprise that he introduced this bill. He is a former mayor of south-west Oxford. He's a former associate minister of municipal affairs and housing responsible for rural affairs, and a former Minister of Agriculture. He's been here for quite a few years, and I know he takes things very seriously.

I think his constituents who are here today—he would never say this and never brag about it, but he has also been a volunteer fireman for 25 years, so he's no stranger to emergencies and taking quick action.

This bill is a good example of a tragedy, unfortunately, that happened in his riding. He created something positive out of a very tragic event for the Hawkins family. The Gignac family was tragically affected as well. Mr. Hardeman has turned this into something that's positive. Our caucus, as Mrs. Witmer said, extends its respect and sympathy to all of the family, and the family members who are here.

It's a very nice tie-in for the students who are here today. I hope you're not bored by all of this. Your actions are really part of what is being debated and, I hope, unanimously moved today in support of the young boy who had autism—and your ribbons and the art that are attached to it. I commend you for it and for taking an active role, as Mr. Hardeman is doing, in making this a celebration of an otherwise tragic event.

The bill, as has been said, does things that I think in the long run—we always like to be less than intrusive into people's lives, but when you are potentially saving a life, it takes on quite a different perspective. In that respect, I believe that all members are speaking in positive terms about having a smoke detector, a carbon monoxide detector and any other instruments that can save lives.

It was very important to note that—all speakers have outlined it—as Mr. Hardeman said, in Canada there are about 13,000 deaths a year attributed to these un-

necessary tragedies. If it's preventable, we should be taking action. In fact, government would have a responsibility to adopt Mr. Hardeman's bill, and I would hope they do. At the end of sessions, quite often the House leaders get together and unanimously agree to move an issue forward. In this way, we could be saving lives.

Presently only homes built after 2001, with a fuel-burning appliance or storage garage, are required to have carbon monoxide detectors. All he is doing here is augmenting or improving an existing provision.

It says here, according to the Canada Safety Council, "Carbon monoxide (CO) is the leading cause of fatal poisonings in North America." So it's not just our own jurisdiction. It's Ontario indeed taking leadership.

That's what the discussion this afternoon is about: It's about the role and duties of members, in this case the member from Oxford, but all members. I know that other members in the House have issues on mandatory smoke detectors and other things. I know that the member who just spoke from the Liberal side, Mrs. Jeffrey from Brampton–Springdale, has a bill she's been pushing that she would like to see become law as well.

Even today it's quite interesting that, without tooting our own horns, I had a constituent who was tragically involved in the death of a father and his daughter. There was an inquest where it was determined that the cause of the death was that they were on a cellphone going across a railway crossing. From that, I introduced a bill, and that bill, I think it was Bill 118, became law today. The general government committee confirmed it, and third reading of that bill was today. It wasn't my bill essentially, but it was the concept that came from people, from a tragedy, from an inquest. As an elected member, we have a duty to listen and respond, as we did. The government, to their credit, adopted it into that bill that was proclaimed today. It's not proclaimed, I don't think; it just passed third reading today. It will be proclaimed sometime shortly, which will ban the use of hand-held cellphones and other technical devices while driving.

I would expect that a year from now every person who is a visitor today here could celebrate, if the Dalton McGuinty government is listening. My assumption is that they are going to support this, that they will integrate it into a piece of legislation that's enforceable and has all the right provisions in it. It would be a really important reason for us to go out on a positive note out of this otherwise tragic event.

Even closer to home, we have five children, and I can recall that probably the only event was that one time one of our children was playing in the garage and started a small fire. Fortunately, we had a fire extinguisher in the garage, which is another kind of safety device, and it was quickly stopped. We all need to have those tools—these alerts, these alarms, these devices—to pay attention. I think that making it mandatory is the other provision.

When you look at the fire departments, whether it's the fire marshal or the fire departments, who now, in my community, go around and inspect the home each year—randomly, I gather—to make sure they have working

smoke detectors—because the worst thing you hear is seeing a tragedy of a fire in a family and they go in and the smoke detectors were not operational, which is very sad.

In these cases, the new kinds of devices are integrated into the electricity system so that they don't have batteries. That's probably the ideal state, but we'll have to see what ultimately is required. I'm confident that any thinking person here today would support it for the reason that it's the right thing to do. It has nothing to do with politics whatsoever. It's out of respect for this tragedy, specifically, where Mr. Hardeman has taken immediate action. I believe the date that he introduced the bill was within days of the tragic event. We can respect that action by Mr. Hardeman by making this law.

Also, I just say to members that there is this very informative little carbon monoxide poisoning pamphlet that I think should be available in MPPs' offices. That would be another important move. All this debate is really about educating consumers on ways that you could save not only your life but someone else's life. I commend Mr. Hardeman for the work and the people who are here to help, give support and encourage us to do the right thing here today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I'd like to thank the member from Oxford for introducing Bill 143, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992 to require carbon monoxide detectors in all residential buildings, and also to thank the Hawkins family, who are present here today, very much for pushing this bill, and the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association for supporting it.

I have a couple of questions, however. In terms of improving this bill somewhat, Mr. Hardeman may want to consider the problem with electrically heated homes. Is it also essential to place carbon monoxide detectors in electrically heated homes? Is that going to be an exemption or should that also be included? Does it matter? I don't know, but you may want to address that issue.

There's also another substantive issue, and that is, how do you enforce and monitor the existing homes and apartments and develop this kind of a monitoring and checking mechanism so that this bill would really be very effective?

I had a chance to speak with Mr. Hardeman in the hallway, and he indicated to me that this actually is a copy of the smoke detector bill, which is very interesting. The smoke detector bill also has a minor problem, and that is that as soon as some people recognize that the bells go off, it begins to hiss or it begins to make a sound, they either take the battery out because it's inconvenient at the time—because there's no fire; there's simply some smoke in the kitchen—or some people even put tape over that mechanism so it doesn't ring as loud. I'm wondering whether it should be essential that the carbon monoxide detectors be wired so that there would be no problem in having a child taking out or pulling out the carbon monoxide detector or being able to fiddle around with it.

In case it goes off, some might think, "Well, it's not a question of carbon monoxide being in the building, but it may just be a faulty wire or the mechanism itself may be somewhat faulty"—and, consequently, either pulling it out or taping over it. So these are some considerations that are very important.

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The city of Toronto, of course, has such legislation already in existence. The question here would be that within city limits, it's important that the carbon monoxide detector is in the basement. So there's one already in the basement; it has to be in the basement. Then there has to be one on the first floor. But the present law does not require that there is a carbon monoxide detector on the third floor or the fourth floor. So if you have a home that has two storeys, you'd only have to have one in the basement and on the first floor, but not on the second floor.

Those are some of the considerations. It's obvious that this bill is important because it saves lives. Also, I'd like to indicate that I will certainly be supporting this bill as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? It would be just the NDP, who have a couple of minutes. No? Then the honourable member for Oxford has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to thank the members from Parkdale-High Park, Brampton-Springdale, Kitchener-Waterloo, Mississauga-Streetsville, Durham and Davenport for their kind comments and their show of support for this bill. I also am mentioning, on the presentation from Brampton-Springdale—and I'd like to commend the member for her bill—that that was in my remarks: I referred to meeting with the professional firefighters, and the reason was to talk about how we could deal with such things as maintenance. We suggested that that would be the very thing the bill would go to committee for, to look at making some amendments that would deal with some of the concerns expressed not only by these professional firefighters, but by members of this House as we move forward.

I also want to say that the bill has already come up with good results, just by introducing it. I think everything should end on a positive note. I got this letter from the Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of Ontario, and it's to Mr. Hardeman:

"I'm writing as a follow-up to our phone call made to your office this morning. I congratulate you on your initiative to make carbon monoxide detectors mandatory in all residences in the province. As I mentioned to your secretary, my family providentially had a narrow escape from CO poisoning.

"As a result of the press coverage of the tragedy in your riding, I decided to purchase CO detectors for my own house. We have had smoke detectors in place for years. I purchased two CO detectors during the afternoon of on Monday, December 8 and, on returning home, put the batteries in place, tested them and placed them on the kitchen counter, intending to install them on Tuesday

once I had determined the appropriate location. Every evening we turn down the thermostat and open a window; this action probably saved us. On Tuesday morning after I had left for the office, my wife phoned me and informed me that the alarms were beeping non-stop. Our oldest son, a widower, and his two children, aged five and seven, are living with us, and the oldest had just left for school. I immediately called the Kingston Fire Department, who responded promptly. They took CO measurements throughout the house and found readings of 150ppm. They suggested calling Union Gas. The gas company also responded promptly and, after investigation, condemned our furnace. We now have a new furnace.

"As you can"—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Sorry. *Interjection.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off, but your time had significantly expired.

The time provided for private members' public business has expired. It's time to vote.

HEALTH CARE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will deal first with ballot item number 1, standing in the name of Mr. Miller, Parry Sound-Muskoka.

Mr. Miller has moved private member's notice of motion number 79. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried. Congratulations.

Motion agreed to.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 2, standing in the name of Mrs. Mangat.

Mrs. Mangat has moved private member's notice of motion number 80. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

HAWKINS GIGNAC ACT (CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS), 2009

LOI HAWKINS GIGNAC DE 2009 (DÉTECTEURS DE MONOXYDE DE CARBONE)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 3, standing in the name of Mr. Hardeman.

Mr. Hardeman has moved second reading of Bill 143, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992 to require carbon monoxide detectors in all residential buildings. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Hardeman?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: To the committee on general government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government? So referred.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2009 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2009

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 31, 2009, on the amendment to the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Debate?

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: It's a privilege, duty and honour, of course, to speak on the Ontario budget, 2009. With your permission and indulgence, I'd like to offer four road signs or road maps in terms of the remarks I'd like to deliver.

First of all, I'd like to share a couple of quotations, one from Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1933—as you know, a former American President who found himself having to deal himself with very similar circumstances of a global economic meltdown. The second quotation is from one Premier Dalton McGuinty.

L'Ontario subit les contrecoups de la crise économique mondiale. L'incidence de cette crise sur la croissance économique, les emplois et les investissements touche directement les particuliers, les familles, les collectivités et les entreprises de l'Ontario. Les pertes d'emplois nuisent aux familles ontariennes. Des collectivités perdent des usines. Les revenus du gouvernement baissent.

Nous faisons face à un défi de taille, mais la population de l'Ontario saura le surmonter.

Speaker, there are a number of things to share with you about the economic crisis that we are going through. As you know and as we hear daily from the press reports and media reports from the United States, whether it's the insurance sector, the broader financial sector, the manufacturing sector, or the powerhouse of North America, the auto sector, all of these various industries are under extreme challenge. Unfortunately, many of them are looking at either liquidation or bankruptcy or very serious reorganization. That, of course, is the climate or the landscape or the background upon which Ontario and Ontario's people and the government of the day find themselves.

So the question arises: In terms of this economic climate, what could have been within this budget to help maintain Ontario's finances? What could have been some of the measures and initiatives? I would say the scorched-earth policy that we might have engaged in. For example, we might have cut hospitals, we might have fired nurses,

we might have privatized yet more of Ontario's collective assets, all in a desperate bid to maintain our financial integrity and lay the foundation stones for tomorrow's prosperity. But of course, as Liberals, as people who move towards a balanced approach, that is not what we did, and that's where I'd like to bring in the quotations: first, from FDR, and I don't mean this to be quite as aggressive or potentially offensive as it is potentially interpretable, but this is what he said, and it dovetails very nicely with Premier McGuinty's quotation as well. FDR said, in 1933, "A conservative is a man with two perfectly good legs who, however, has never learned how to walk forward." That reminds us of a quotation that our own Premier shares with us. He says—I think, by the way, in a quite inspiring and intelligent manner—that it's neither about the right or the left; it's about moving forward. With that, that opens up the opportunity for Ontarians and for this chamber and for this government to reemphasize what I would call the differing philosophies between the various parties that are represented here. There are some governments that tend to be Republican, tend to be Conservative, tend to be right-wing, whose philosophy is one of privatizing the gains and socializing the losses. That's something we were dealing with, unfortunately, in eight years of the Bush administration.

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For example, a former government in Ontario was quite happy to privatize and to sell off things like water inspection, meat inspection and possibly TVOntario. They took a \$100-billion tract of land called Highway 407 and essentially gave it away, for rent, for a 99-year lease in perpetuity, for approximately \$1 billion. They accessed outside consultants—for example the Andersen, now Accenture, consulting firm—to actually do a \$100-million analysis of Ontario's welfare system. They were called just before the privatization of the LCBO, called just before the privatization and sell-off of Ontario's nuclear assets and so on. That is not what the McGuinty government is all about. The McGuinty government is about balance. So within this particular budget you will see, for example, initiatives and measures for individuals, for business, for families, for corporations, for Main Street as well as for Bay Street.

With that, I'd like to offer a quotation from—I just recently read an article written by Joseph Stiglitz, who is a 2001 Nobel Prize winner in economics. This is from Harper's Magazine, a very current, January 2009, issue. It says: "The worst legacy of the past eight years" of the Bush administration "is that despite colossal government spending, most Americans are worse off... This is because money was squandered in Iraq and given as a tax windfall to America's richest individuals and corporations, rather than spent on such projects"—and here is where I bring your attention—"as education, infrastructure, and energy independence, which would have made all of us better off in the long term."

The phrase "education, infrastructure, and energy independence" would, I think, very justly characterize

what is, after all, the balanced approach found here in the Ontario budget, for which—I think all of us who have had town meetings and radio, television and print interviews are really finding it to be a budget of parts, because, as we have met with our constituents, met with stakeholders, learned ourselves about some of the different initiatives and programs that are found within the budget, we ourselves are finding that it is a truly balanced package of approaches and initiatives for individuals and for business.

Individuals will be experiencing, once all the various initiatives and measures of this budget are fully implemented, approximately \$10.6 billion—\$10.6 billion—in tax relief. Businesses will be experiencing something in the order of about \$4.5 billion of corporate tax relief. About 93% of families in Ontario will be experiencing a lower tax burden. For example, as is known, as has been publicized and received very well by our communities, by our residents, by our voters and by the stakeholders, a family earning a combined income of less than \$160,000 annually will actually be receiving a \$1,000 cheque from the government of Ontario. Individuals who are earning less than \$80,000 will be receiving a total of \$300.

Now, I have to confess that, as a doctor, there are a number of things that I attempt to understand; I've always found taxation to be a bit of a mystery. But, having said that, things like the single sales tax, I am told—and it seems to be reinforced within the broader business community—are perhaps the single greatest initiative manoeuvre that the government of Ontario, from a tax policy point of view, could be doing, could have done, will be doing in terms of streamlining our tax policy with other major jurisdictions across the world, as well as helping Ontario businesses to flourish, and of course helping to lay the foundation stones for future prosperity.

As well, one of very important initiatives within this particular budget is that the tax rate on new business investment in Ontario is now going to be halved, and with that, I understand we'll become the most competitive jurisdiction in North America. Why are we doing all of this? All of this together is part of the package of reforms, the package of, as I say, multi-faceted approaches and initiatives—whether it's tax relief or other streamlining measures or cutting red tape or exemptions, which are also very well detailed—that the government of Ontario is doing to build a stronger, more prosperous and just society.

I repeat: These are not only initiatives that are, as we might say, right wing or left wing, but as the Premier has said, moving Ontario forward. Even one of the more irascible columnists of the Ottawa Citizen, not generally a supporter of the government of Premier McGuinty, or of the Liberal Party for that matter, has called this budget "a textbook example of successful issue management." That, I think, speaks very deeply to some of our own core beliefs. We are still, as I said earlier, trying to adopt the middle road, the golden mean, the medial pathway, not slashing and burning and adopting a scorched earth

technique, which we might have done had we been animated or informed by different philosophies.

Le gouvernement McGuinty s'est engagé à diriger l'Ontario vers une nouvelle ère marquée au coin de la compétitivité, de la réussite et de la prospérité. Ces progrès ne se produiront pas du jour au lendemain. Dans la conjoncture mondiale actuelle, aucun budget ne peut faire cela, quel que soit le gouvernement. Tout comme le présent budget se fonde sur les réussites des cinq dernières années, les budgets futurs s'inspireront des mesures prises aujourd'hui.

As we've talked about, in terms of not only withholding that reflex from, for example, a more right wing, Republican or Conservative reflex to actually cut and slash and burn—I remember a Premier of a previous day actually equating nurses to hula hoops and literally firing 10,000 nurses. I would, by the way, like to commend the previous Conservative government for actually building a stronger health care system. The only problem is that that health care system was in Houston or in other jurisdictions in North America, because once they actually fired those nurses and they found themselves without employment here in Ontario, they of course went abroad to the Middle East and stateside, and of course there were fairs on a regular basis essentially taking up some of the slack of the Ontario health care system.

Instead, as I said earlier, we're adopting a balanced approach. We're talking about education, green energy and health care. Of course that's why I'm very proud to be here as the member for provincial Parliament for Etobicoke North, not only speaking on behalf of my own constituents, but of course even my young ones, Shamsa and Shafiq Jr., who I know are tuned in very eagerly and devotedly.

Let me speak for a moment directly to health care. We could have slashed hospitals, fired nurses, laid off other individuals in the health care sector, cut medical school spaces, not moved so aggressively to include, for example, other medications, new therapies and new treatments in the health care system, given the fact that that is the demographic greying of the country and seniors are even using more and more health care dollars. Maybe, from a purely financial, bean-counting, numbers, Microsoft spreadsheet point of view, that might have been very popular and very easy to do. But we are Liberals. We are McGuinty Liberals, and we see ourselves as stewards of the public trust. One of those prime trusts, of course, is our health care system. So I'm pleased to report that even with all this extraordinary economic challenge and global economic meltdown, the government of Ontario is still pledging to spend, in this particular budget, \$13.2 billion more on the health care system than when we took office. This speaks to the values that Ontarians share and that in fact are defining values of Canada.

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Our budget, for example, will now be devoting itself to spending something in the order of \$42.6 billion, almost half of our provincial outlay, just on the health care system. And there are many subsectors and sub-

points that could be mentioned in defence, in support, in reinforcement of this massive health care commitment, whether it's, for example, \$40 million for high-growth hospitals, \$360 million for the emergency room wait-time reduction strategy, \$223 million for an at-home aging strategy, \$35 million for 22 nurse-practitioner-led clinics or 50 more family health teams and so on. All of these are initiatives that we have detailed, that are on the public record, that are available to Ontarians on websites. Again, it speaks, as I said earlier, to the Premier's deep and heartfelt and mobilized and actioned commitment of being neither right nor left but moving Ontario forward in a balanced, fiscally sound approach which nevertheless continues to be animated by, I would say, the Trudeau aspiration of creating a more prosperous and just society.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm going to have an opportunity to speak in approximately half an hour or so. But I was intrigued by my friend from Etobicoke North's remarks about this budget being neither right nor left and that it's balanced. I want him to help me a little bit.

As I see it, corporate tax cuts are something that you thought Conservatives have been bugging you about for a long time, and Duncan, the Minister of Finance, was opposed to them and now he supports them. And so he's introduced \$2.2 billion or so of corporate tax cuts, which we as New Democrats view as something that Conservatives normally would do and that you're proud of having done in the past and that you're proud to do today. A harmonized tax is something that John Tory supported, that Bob Runciman, in principle, supports and something that McGuinty, the Premier, and Duncan, the finance minister, opposed. But now you present it as something that is yours, and you say that's neither left nor right, but New Democrats view that as something particularly right and conservative. I just wonder, in the two instances that I have given, where is the left in that, when you say it's neither left nor right and that it's balanced? The only thing balanced about it is that the Tories and Liberals have a balanced approach to these issues and that in this regard both you and they are in sync with each other, which we view as right wing. So help me; where is the left in all of that again?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Charles Sousa: I'm very pleased to speak to the budget. I compliment my colleague from Etobicoke North. I would like to also remind my other colleagues here that Ontario has benefited from strong economic fundamentals that this government has had in place for a number of years now. We've had balanced budgets year after year and we're one of the lowest debt-to-GDP ratios in North America.

Bottom line, we've taken precautions to weather this economic downturn and we're moving forward with this budget. The budget is bold. It's a stimulus package that's dynamic and comprehensive. It will help families. It does take advantage of business cuts as well as personal

income cuts to weather and recover from the global economic downturn. The budget is also about growth, it's about making sure we maintain Ontario's competitiveness. It's designed to welcome investment, encourage jobs, and create hope and opportunities for families.

I would like to speak specifically about the three components of the tax reform package embedded within this budget.

It's a modern tax reform package that talks about harmonization, which enables us to be more efficient, and there are offsets for the pricing impact that may occur, by way of exemptions as well as some rebates.

The second part of this reform package is a reduction of personal income tax. Income tax will be one of the lowest, for our lowest-income earners, and will be seen as the lowest in Canada. There are also going to be new and permanent tax credits, as well as those transitional payments, to help families adjust.

The third component is the business tax cuts. During the last number of years that I've been a member of the finance committee and doing pre-budget consultations, two issues have come out glaringly. One is, social programs need to be protected, which is part of the left. The other part is, businesses have expressed concerns that they need more facilitations, to provide incentives, to become more competitive.

I support this budget, given those initiatives.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I did listen to the member from Etobicoke North, at least a good part of it. There were certain points I chose to ignore because it was more partisan in content. I think that if he believes some of the stuff he says, you would quite often be predisposed to ignore any substantial things. He's an intelligent fellow, but sometimes that meanness comes through, and I'm sure it happens in his own caucus.

There are a couple of things that need to be brought forward. When he's talking about the left and the right, and that there's a right or a wrong, I believe that where he misses the point is, he has got to look at the facts as opposed to the rhetoric part.

Look at your own budget, on page 96, and the federal transfer payments. I can tell you, I've read a petition into the books over the last two weeks or so, since the good news came out for health care—that there isn't enough money. In fact, it's a structural deficit in health care. They've settled with the nurses and doctors and the other workers—reasonable settlements, I suppose—for 3% per year over four years, so it's 12%, but they've actually given them funding at 2%. Of the 100-and-some hospitals, 70-some of them are in deficit now—in our case, it's \$14 million. Now they're going to exacerbate it.

The Ontario Hospital Association—this is the OHA—said that they're going to lay off 5,000 nurses, yet the Liberals stand up and say they're going to hire 6,000. I have difficulty trusting what is being said.

In his remarks—and I fortunately have the privilege of speaking next—he said a few things that are completely

inconsistent. I think he's reading the notes he was given. Although he's an intelligent fellow—you ought to look at some of the notes—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further questions and comments?

Seeing none, the honourable member from Etobicoke North has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I would like to thank my honourable colleagues from Trinity-Spadina, Mississauga South and, somewhat under duress, even the member from Durham.

I would like to say that I would first like to step away from my desk so that there will be no question of notes.

Secondly, I think that all of us who were engaged with members of our community, whether they're from business or are modest-income folks; whether it was in Etobicoke or beyond—chambers of commerce, corporate leaders, poverty activists, individuals who are most concerned with the health care system, individuals who are essentially our educational communities—all of these people have come forward and really attested to the fact that the government of Ontario is truly moving forward in a balanced approach.

Whether you would like to evade the various characterizations of right or left or Conservative, Republican, Liberal or NDP, that is perhaps a discussion for another matter. But there are things here that appeal to all of these different groups, and that is, of course, basically part of the strong mandate that we take very seriously, here on the government side, as stewards of the public good, attempting to, yes, address concerns of business and corporations, as they're telling us about things like red tape and non-competitive taxation; and at the same time maintaining, I would say, a fundamental compassion that continues to animate our initiatives, procedures and legislative efforts here. For example, we're dealing with things like the Ontario child benefit, or the \$260 rebate or the cash cheque that will be offered to families of various income levels across Ontario.

All told, I think it is truly a budget for the times, given the global economic meltdown that the government of Ontario and other governments across the world have to deal with.

1650

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to stand and address some of the issues in the budget in a very limited amount of time. I would like to start by talking about a few things, really. The most important part of what we do, I believe—and some of it's in the budget, in all honesty, in all fairness—is to create a climate for investment. And with the investment, basically—as I think of it, as a Conservative, as I interpret it; not the ideology that's been described by the previous speaker. You create a vibrant economy by different policies, by tax as well as spending policies, and red tape and regulations, to encourage investments for jobs; high-value jobs are better. And with that, you create wealth or you

add wealth by value-added activities, through both knowledge and skills, so that you can spend money to improve the quality of life.

I think the best example of that is, if you look at some other countries in the world—I believe that men are created equal regardless of where they live, their race, creed, colour and all the rest of it. We could look, for instance, at Afghanistan as a place. I believe the people there are victimized by the politics of the area and perhaps a lack of a plan. But ultimately it starts with no economy. There's no real economy. The economy is an illegitimate economy, and the economy doesn't get spread around equitably. There are no rules to the game.

When you don't have an economy, you don't have a justice system to resolve disputes, whether it's the gender disputes that were in the paper today or other disputes. You generally don't have an educational system so people can educate themselves through society into better standards of living for themselves and others, and you quite often don't have the justice system, you don't have a monetary system—you don't have a system, but which came first?

I put to you as well that in those economies, there are intelligent and capable people who need resources to learn, study and progress, and if they don't have the plan and the leadership with the courage to do the right things—not necessarily the right things, i.e., American, Canadian or North American, but to look at the history of civilization. Some of the parts of the world are well renowned for studies in physics and astronomy and other things.

I'm trying to establish that I'm a fiscal Conservative, and I think I'm a compassionate person, and I believe that we have a debt to our fellow man. But all of that comes under certain kinds of responsibilities, by being honest about what you say and what you promise to do. Keep the promises you make. I'm not attributing any of this any more than the previous speaker—that one party has all of the right answers. That's completely wrong and wrong-headed, to believe that anyone here sets out deliberately and maliciously, as has been portrayed. I'm very upset, actually, by that type of approach and comment.

When you talk about the opportunity for people, I think it is a matter that, even going back to—I'll read kind of a statement here. There were earlier opposition day motions that encouraged Premier McGuinty to look at the job losses, and the one I'm looking at is starting in January 2005: 153,000 manufacturing jobs were lost by a series of companies. I could list them. There was no real action plan. It was considered back then as kind of a modest contraction, where they were shutting whole plants down. There was obviously no plan. I think this comes back from the hope that the economy would pick up.

Then the next argument was, again, to blame Jim Flaherty and Stephen Harper. We heard in the debate earlier today about the unemployment insurance rules. The person who actually changed them was Paul Martin.

So I'm not blaming them. These are the real facts of what I refer to. But even now, in the budget, when I talk about—and the good doctor spoke. Here are a bunch of cards I received from my riding. Most members have received them from their long-term-care homes. They're not permitted, because they're not in a proper format for a petition, but I will read one. It says, "How to Make the Numbers Work." This is actually written by constituents, not by me or some political commentator. It says:

"Dear MPP:

"In the upcoming budget, please ask your government on my behalf to make the numbers work for long-term-care-residents and for all Ontarians."

There was a resolution by Mr. Miller today, which was unanimously supported. This goes on to say:

"It starts with ...

"Correcting the six-year erosion in funding for house-keeping, maintenance, laundry, trading, utilities and other services that support residential care, comfort and safety."

Six years of erosion.

"It is completed by ...

"Fully implementing the already promised"—this is one of the promises—"2,500 extra personal support workers and 2,000 more nurses, and funding the three additional minutes of direct care still needed to reach a daily average of three worked hours of resident care; and

"Investing in high-impact resident care initiatives such as programs and activities, meal preparation, and incontinence care.

"Increased care and services in long-term-care homes equals decreased ER and hospital wait times."

These are all signed, and all members got them. I'm submitting these as evidence from people from the nursing homes in my riding, which would be Strathaven nursing home, Port Perry nursing home and others—there are about four or five of them, and I do try to visit them and listen.

As was said today, there have been no long-term-care homes built. In fact, that is a deficit, and growing. It exacerbates the whole health care debate, because if there's no room in long-term care for them—they have a promise now, called the aging-at-home strategy, and I don't see much funding for that as well. I know people in long-term care are waiting to be transferred, as well as persons who can't get care in their homes. That's one topic I see in the budget.

I should tell you as well, if you look in the budget—I think it's important to refer to the actual numbers that were provided by the McGuinty government. If I look on the expenditure side, I see they have increased the funding in health and long-term care just over the billion-dollar mark. It's now going to be \$19 billion on the hospital side and \$22.9 billion across the board in health and long-term care. They have increased it, as I say, by about \$1 billion.

What I'm saying to you is: If you look at the transfer payments coming in on the revenue side, the Canada health transfer—this has been an argument for years—

has increased by \$1.1 billion, the social transfer has increased by about half a billion, and actually the equalization factor, which is the overall health of the economy adjustment factor—we are a net recipient now, for the first time in history, so we are a have-not province; I don't like to use that term, but I'm just saying it's tragic that we've slipped from being the value leader in the Canadian economy. There was \$800 million transferred from the federal government to increase the funding for hospitals.

Now, it will be allocated by Premier McGuinty and Minister Caplan, but I can tell you now that almost all hospitals—I can't account for all, but I think about 75 of the current hospitals, according to the Ontario Hospital Association, have an operating deficit.

In my riding, there's actually a bit of a disconnect between the way the LHINs, the local health integrated networks, are structured. The hospital in Uxbridge actually comes under governance from the Central LHIN, but it's physically in the Central East LHIN. I still haven't got an answer from them about their funding. Does it flow through the Central or the Central East LHIN when the population and the services are provided in the central east catchment area? They have set up a whole governance thing, called the LHINs, the local health—yeah, local. They're bigger than most provinces. Local? You couldn't drive in less than two or three hours from end to end in any one of the LHINs close to our area.

1700

So those LHINs are acting as a buffer between the Ministry of Health and the hospital boards. Those hospital boards, by the way, are volunteers. They are leaders in the community who volunteer. This money—I'll give you an example of how inequitably it was distributed. There was a report by Price Waterhouse that said the province allocated this year \$100 million for growth funding. Of the \$100 million, last year they flushed out about \$20 million, I think, to all the LHINs. This year in the budget they flushed out another \$30 million, I believe. My number could be off a bit. But I know the specifics of last year. Central East LHIN was allocated \$4.5 million. That LHIN covers all the way from Victoria, Haliburton and Brock down to Northumberland. It includes all of the sort of Northumberland Clarington area, all of Durham region, and I don't know how many hospitals in total. But in that area, the largest area, Durham, has 600,000 people. The Price Waterhouse people said that of the \$4.5 million, \$3 million should go to the Central East LHIN at Lakeridge.

What did they get? Here's the real problem, on the record. I'm saying this so that it can be refuted if anybody's listening and wants to pay attention. They actually allocated—of the \$3 million, the Central East LHIN allocated to Lakeridge \$900,000. Not \$1 million, not \$3 million: \$900,000. That hospital is operating with a deficit of around 10 point something million dollars. It wouldn't have solved the problem, but it would have helped the problem to not get worse, because next year

they're forecasting about a \$15- to \$17-million deficit. What does that mean? That they actually have to borrow the money, if they are permitted; they have rules around how much they can borrow. That's just the hospital I'm reporting, but the same goes for Rouge Valley and other systems as well. They're all in trouble. Not some: all.

I've talked about the long-term care. I've talked about ours. Last week in my community, and I've spoken about it three times this week, there was a demonstration in our community led by the doctors: not by the mayor, not by the regional chair, but the doctors. The doctors and nurses are saying that they're going to close the hospital. And what is the Ontario Health Coalition saying? Natalie and some of the others who are travelling the province are saying Petrolia and Kingston and almost across the—they're closing, stealthily, emergencies and obstetric wards. It's death by a thousand swords to the system. What they're actually doing is terminating a lot of these hospitals, in the general sense, and turning them into stabilizing transfer sites to major sites called regional health centres. So there's anything but good news in the health care system, as far as I can see, despite the fact that the federal government has increased the transfer.

People have been talking in the last number of years about the wait times, the five key priorities of the wait times, as if it's all—the federal government has been ponying up half a billion dollars a year for that. I never heard one mention of it. I'm quoting from the book right here, your own book: \$500 million a year. I never hear them say one thing about it. They blame them for everything.

So in fairness to the argument that was started here earlier by the previous speaker, I'm just saying, let's look at the numbers and let's deal with those. We can deal with that without dealing with personalities and sharp comments with respect to someone's position on the scale, as if they're somehow perfect. There's no one here, including me, who's perfect. Let's start at that point and we can have an honest debate.

The next thing: I'm quite concerned about the equity in the discussion and this debate this morning. We read in the paper of the transfer of some \$9 million into transit. In a general sense, I would say that's a good thing. I'm not opposed to growth and having a plan by any stretch. I think it is somewhat questionable, given the fact that they now have the largest deficit in history. Let's repeat that. Here we are with the fanfare, new suit, big picture, photo op with the ribbons; we're going to spend \$9 million—\$9 billion. By the same token, the previous day they told us they had a \$14-billion deficit, meaning they're borrowing the money. In fact, the Toronto Star said in the article—the Toronto Star is commonly known as the Liberal rag or the Liberal briefing notes. That's a humorous comment, not to comment on the people writing in it, but they have their editorial bias. It said at the end of the article—you can quote it—that they don't know where the money is coming from. I can tell you they're actually borrowing it. In fact, the way they finance capital now under PSAB, the public sector accounting rules, is they actually show

on the books the portion of the depreciation amount of capital for that year. So if it's going to last 25 years, they show 1/25 of the capital that year. They just show a capital expenditure each year. They don't show the \$9 billion.

There is a bill before the House on transit, Bill 163—it's a very important bill—and it comes out of a big report issued by Metrolinx called The Big Move. Well, it's a big move all right. Pay attention, Mr. Speaker. The Big Move report is going to require the province—that's you and I; I know the Premier is in charge at the moment. It's part of the Move 2020 plan; these are all kinds of fancy acronyms. It all comes down to what Metrolinx promised to spend. I believe it was \$50 billion over 10 years. Think about it. We throw these billions around like they're horseshoes; \$50 billion over 10 years is \$5 billion a year. Five billion dollars a year is going to come from where? I think that's a fair question. Let's leave that question on the table.

We've got the transit plan. If you look at Bill 163, there is a requirement that in 2013—2013 happens to be after the next election—they're going to have a plan on how to fund it. I can tell you now, the briefing I had with the ministry officials is that there is going to be a P3 private sector—let's go back to the hospitals. Remember in the election they said, "Oh, we can't have private hospitals. Oh, no." All their hospitals are private, all of them. They're being funded by renting them. They're letting another private company build them and they're actually renting them.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: No. The two ministers here are saying it's not true; it is true. If not, you refute it. You put the paper on the table. The one in Brampton—they're all private, okay? They're borrowing the money.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Not Peterborough.

Mr. John O'Toole: The new one in Peterborough was actually started when we were in government.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes, it was. I was there. I can only say that we all have a role in trying to protect our hospitals.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: I know they're upset because some of this factual information is difficult for them to respond to. In fact, I'm quoting the books, the pages, the numbers—the exact numbers. Read The Big Move. You haven't even read it. You haven't got the foggiest idea of what you're talking about. It's \$50 billion.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I read it.

Mr. John O'Toole: Have you read it? It's this thick.

I had a meeting with Rob MacIsaac. He told me, and I can quote it for you right now, he doesn't know how it's going to be funded. There's a whole section dealing with how they're going to pay for it. They have no clue. They announced they're going to build a subway or something up to the airport in the city of Toronto and David Miller, the great spenderama, is just tickled pink. He'll be whining about a week from now for more money.

When I look at my riding and parts of Ontario and the gas tax and the inequity of how they distribute the gas tax, it's another piece of work. This is all part of transit and it's all part of the budget and it's part of my concern about the three priorities: jobs, health care, transit. Jobs tie to the auto sector and the manufacturing decline in Ontario. It's the whole issue of fairness in how the money is distributed. It's not there in The Big Move plan. All we get is a bus-rapid transit system by about 2012, and that's not even for sure. The York money and the Toronto money was announced yesterday to build a subway or some kind of rail system to the airport, to the enhancement of Union Station.

1710

I would say that when you look at all of the things that I've put on the table here, we are in it together, if we can slow the arguments down and don't act like they're in charge of everything. I can tell you how they're going to pay for it. They have another bill out there, Bill 150. This stuff will be recorded and, for what good it is, I like the content of what we do. Bill 150 is another example. They've got us on the hook on the new energy act. It's called the Green Energy Act. It's a nice-sounding name. I support green energy. I support conservation as the first initiative. What isn't being stated truly is that they have another little thing, and people at home would know you're getting what they call a smart meter at your house. It's not a smart meter. It's actually a—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Sorry, the honourable member's time has expired.

Mr. John O'Toole: Can I have unanimous consent for another hour or so?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I heard a no. Questions and comments? Questions and comments?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: My apologies. I was just distracted for a moment or so following the comments of the member from Durham. He opened up his comments talking about a budget and the function of government. I can paraphrase, I hope. Part of the strategy is creating a climate for investment, as part of an economic structure that allows us to provide for the welfare of those we represent in this province or in other jurisdictions.

I might say that in a very broad sense, that's what this budget has been about. As the finance minister said and as the Premier has outlined in his comments publicly, this is about retaining the security of the public services that we are entrusted with here in this place. It's ensuring that we retain those services that we have worked so hard to, might I suggest, rebuild in health and education and make many of the types of investments throughout this province that the member for Durham spoke about. It's about supporting those public services in education and in post-secondary education that will help position us such that we do have a climate for investment; that we are producing the skilled youth and adults in these communities who are able to take on the roles; to create the jobs to support the investments that are going to be made here so that we can prosper, and by doing that, be able to continue to provide for the health and education, principally, of our communities.

In addition to that, we have a substantive concern on this side of the House, shared in part on all sides, but I might say not totally, in ensuring that those who are disadvantaged in our community—that we provide for those through poverty reduction strategies, through adjustments of things like Ontario Works and Ontario disability support payments, through support to children who need it; that we lift them up with us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I do apologize; I just got in at the tail end of the speech from my colleague from Durham.

It's rather interesting: I'm quite sure as the federal finance minister, the federal member from Whitby-Oshawa, was formulating his budget in late January—I know he's a good friend of the member from Durham—he was probably getting some advice from the member from Durham on what indeed should be in that federal budget. As we know, the federal budget certainly has a substantial amount of fiscal stimulus to get not only Ontario but other provinces in Canada moving ahead, as we have some international economic challenges that Ontario and Canada are certainly part of as we move forward.

It's interesting in this budget that there's a substantial investment in skills development and training and expansion of those opportunities within community colleges. Right now, Durham College—I know it's something that's supported by the member from Durham—is going through a huge expansion to enhance its skills development and apprenticeship program to provide those individuals within Durham region and beyond that opportunity to pursue a career of their choice. Those are very important things.

Certainly, our investment in transit that was announced will be a sufficient catalyst to give the opportunity for the good folks in Thunder Bay, represented so ably by my friend Mr. Mauro, the member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan, and the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, Mr. Gravelle, to get those jobs in that particular riding, and indeed to get people out of their cars and onto transit, to reduce gridlock in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments? The honourable member for Willowdale, are you standing?

Further questions and comments? Seeing none, the honourable member from Durham has two minutes to respond.

Mr. John O'Toole: I thank the members from Pickering-Scarborough East and Peterborough for their comments. I do appreciate that quite sincerely.

I just think it's important to say okay, we've got this difficulty and we're all in it together: the \$14-billion deficit; spending is up by 60%; a large deficit; debt has doubled; the cost of servicing the debt. Let's hope that the interest rate stays low. If it doesn't, we're in serious trouble. Interest always has to be greater than inflation,

so if you start to see inflation, watch the interest rate; watch the cost of debt go up.

These are the basic parameters that I tried to get to in the economics of all of this: having a stable hand and a manageable leadership group. When I look at what you're doing—you will never get underneath the health tax. The harmonization tax is one, and that's about \$2 billion to \$3 billion. It's going to cost a person to fill up their car—2,000 litres a year; that's for a year—about \$350 in additional tax, just for the gas for their car. If you look at the Ontario health tax that you've brought in, which you promised you wouldn't, it is bringing in \$3 billion. You're increasing spending on the backs of people. That's fine. The people, at the end of the day, will judge the quality of life and the standard of living that you're putting out there. But eventually people in their homes will be paying more. They're paying more for electricity, they're paying more for everything they have, and is it any better? Spending is up 60%, and I ask the people of Ontario, are you any better off? Are you waiting at the hospital? Have you got a doctor? Are your drugs any more affordable? Is there a real cure for the aging population?

There is no plan except to raise your taxes. You can be assured that your pockets will be less full next year but you won't have anything more in your other pocket.

I think this whole debate needs to be expanded, and I hope other members will participate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's a real pleasure to have 20 minutes to speak to the budget.

I want to speak mostly to the harmonization of the GST and the PST by Monsieur McGuinty. I want to show that there is a Conservative political proclivity here that the Liberals are trying to deny. I will give you some quotes to show the incredible rapprochement between the Libs and the Conservatives.

I'll begin with a quote. I started yesterday and I just ran out of time. What a pleasure to have 20 more minutes to be able to elucidate some of the points that I tried to make yesterday.

We have, of the Conservative Party, Mr. Bob Runciman, who said the following—he's the interim leader of the Conservative Party: "In theory, we're supportive of harmonization." Now, when someone says, "We are, in theory, supportive," what they really mean is, "We are, in practice, supportive of harmonization." There is no distinction here. You cannot break that up. You can either try to have subsets or simply say, "Put this in brackets. We really mean 'in theory' but we really don't mean 'in practice.'" But what they mean is, "As Conservatives, we support harmonization, but we really can't say that because we believe"—Tories—"that this is an issue that's going to hurt the Liberals, and we're going to get ahead of it and we're going to be very populist and we're going to show you how wrong you are." That's what I believe this is about.

Then we have the former leader of the Conservative Party—I said yesterday that I liked him very much—

John Tory. I thought he was a really decent human being. He said that “the government”—this was November 26—“should consider moves like cutting corporate tax”—and I will get to that in a very brief moment, or moments—“or harmonizing sales taxes to stimulate the economy.” That’s very unequivocal. John Tory was very supportive of the harmonization of the goods and services tax—federal—and the provincial sales tax—provincial. In my view, Conservatives like it. Mr. Flaherty, the finance minister federally, he likes it. In fact, he has been beating up on the Liberals for a whole year saying why they need to do it and how essential it is that they do it.

1720

Now, you remember Mr. Flaherty. He used to be around here for quite a long time—eight and a half long years. Yes siree, eight and a half long years. I’m assuming he was very close to the other Conservative members. My sense is that they have some affinity, politically, around issues of that sort. I could be wrong, but it’s my sense that they’re really tight on these kinds of fiscal questions. On harmonization, I can almost guarantee that 99.9% of these Conservative MPPs support it, in theory and in practice, but can’t say so and will not say so. They’re happy to separate themselves from the federal Tories and distinguish themselves as provincial members rather than federal Tories as a way of saying, “They do what they’ve got to do, and we do what we’ve got to do.”

Now I want to show, through the two quotes that I presented yesterday, how far the Liberals used to be from this issue and how close they have come to embracing it—happily, cheerfully. So you have Liberal members saying how bold this is and how modern and that it’s about growth and it’s balanced. I’m going to challenge you, as soon as I get a chance, each and every Liberal, to stand up when you speak and say, “I defend harmonization because I believe it’s good for my community.” I challenge each and every one of you who has an opportunity to speak to this to say, “I’m a believer in harmonization,” and at the end say, “Amen.” I’m looking forward to it, because there have been a couple of speakers already—with the exception of the member for Mississauga South, who actually said he supports it. I heard him say that; God bless. I want the people of Mississauga South to know that this member supports harmonization because, he says, this is the modern thing to do.

Now, I expect you, Speaker, when you have an opportunity to speak, and I expect all of these other Liberals here, the so-called rump, and one of them is going to speak here soon, to say, “I love harmonization because I think it’s good for my people.” I think the member from Willowdale is going to speak, because he has three books here, and that’s always an indication that people are about to stand to speak, which would be in approximately 20 or 25 minutes. So I want him to stand up and say, “I love harmonization. This is good for me.”

Mr. Mike Colle: He loves books. There’s no tax on books.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Only Ignatieff loves books. He’s the only learned federal member that we’ve got in

the whole world. He’s the only one who’s learned. Nobody else can be learned.

Here are two quotes that I want to repeat for your pleasure. Here is Mr. Dwight Duncan, the finance minister, who but a mere short couple of months ago, in November, said, in response to the badgering from the Conservative Party on corporate tax cuts—which I will get to in a while, because I have 13 more long minutes—Dwight, the minister, said, “If you think corporate tax cuts are going to solve the problem, you’re sadly mistaken.” That’s what Dwight Duncan said: “You’re all sadly mistaken”—Dwight Duncan, the Minister of Finance, November 4, 2008.

Mr. Mike Colle: That was just as the world economy was collapsing.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Oh, yeah, sure. Let me tell you: November, December—just to help out because, you know—January, February, March, and now we’re in early April; four or five months. In four or five months, we have had the apocalypse take place, and lo and behold, the Minister of Finance has come and seen the Conservative light and said, “We’ve got to change. We’ve got to move forward.” He said, “We have very competitive tax rates, number one, in spite of what others say,” meaning the right. Number two, he says, “We’re cutting the capital tax to the tune already of \$1.5 billion.” No siree; no, Duncan was not going to cut any more. No, Duncan was so convinced, so right, so Liberal that, no, he would never cut corporate taxes.

Where is Dwight? It doesn’t matter. He must be listening.

What happened? Minister of Finance, what happened to you? The whole world collapsed? The world collapsed all of a sudden, Dwight? Just about four months ago you didn’t know, and all of a sudden you need to cut corporate taxes in order to solve the problems of Ontario? Come on, Dwight. Dwight, please.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: He’s not here.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You can’t say he’s not here. Minister, you can’t say he’s not here. You can’t say that. I would caution you.

Here is what mon ami Dalton McGuinty said: “If that were so, then you would think that at the House leaders’ meeting, which just concluded a few moments ago, the representative for the Conservative Party might have raised this very issue. That was not the case. Instead, they chose to do that within the context of a highly charged question period. I understand that’s their right ... but I think it undermines their credibility in this particular regard.

“Here’s the real issue,” he said, “and we need to expose this to the light of day,” member from Eglinton-Lawrence. He said we “need to expose this to the light of day.”

Mr. Mike Colle: Expose what?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That was June. *Interjections.*

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I know; you’re right. That was a different time, a different world.

He said, "They"—meaning the Tories—"want to cut taxes in the province of Ontario by \$5 billion. That is not going to help businesses that are struggling today." And today—the past week and a half—McGuinty introduces \$2.2 billion, \$2.4 billion in corporate—by half. So they're meeting the Tories halfway.

So the world has changed. It's so drastic and the economy is so collapsed that, okay, he's changed his mind and he's only going to cut corporate taxes by \$2.4 billion. He can't go all the way, because the world has not fully collapsed, but he's got to go halfway in order to be able to solve the problem.

My dear friends, whoever is watching, you understand how cynical I've become. And I understand how cynical you are on a daily basis. That's why we lose credibility as politicians all the time. You've got politicians on the right saying, "Do it." You've got politicians in the mushy middle saying, "Oh, no," and then they proceed to do it. Then you've got members like my friend from Etobicoke North, who spoke a few moments earlier, saying, "This is neither right nor left; it's balanced." No, it is completely Conservative in its inclination, and the politics is Conservative to the highest degree.

I'm going to elaborate for your pleasure, member from Eglinton—Lawrence.

I attack harmonization. I believe that it's fundamentally wrong. It's a consumption tax, and we all know this. The Liberals are afraid to raise income taxes, so they are going to tax consumption. It's a consumption tax.

The problem with a consumption tax—and I think some Liberals know, or many; I don't know—is that when you tax consumption, whether those at the highest level of income pay a couple of dollars more is irrelevant. But the people who get whacked in perpetuity, eternally, are the people in the middle, the middle class, those earning anywhere from \$40,000 to \$80,000 to \$85,000 or so. These are the people who are going to get whacked forever.

Now I want you to stand up, Minister, and say your two cents' worth in two minutes. I want you to debate what I'm saying. I want you to say, "No, you're wrong." I want you to stand up and do your two minutes in a little while.

These consumption taxes that whack the middle class in perpetuity are on energy, so you're going to get whacked every time you go to fuel up. The minister—the ministers—and the government say, "Oh, no, they will pass that on to the consumers." Please. Have you met any human being who says, "Oh, yeah, you're right. Yeah, the oil industry is going to lower their price when I go to buy gas"? Because we're harmonizing, they expect that somehow some of those savings are going to be passed on to the consumer and it will all even out. Please, Minister, I want you to stand for two minutes, for my pleasure, and tell me why you disagree with me.

1730

Mr. Mike Colle: I will.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Okay, Mike, you stand up and do your two minutes. But I see his head shaking, as if

somehow he's got some bright thing to say. I want him to say it, so I can hear it.

No one is going to pass on the savings—absolutely no one. Not Tim Hortons, not the gasoline station, not the oil companies. They are going to absorb it and we, the middle class, will pay forever. That is what this is about: \$2.2 billion or \$2.4 billion in corporate tax cuts that go to profitable companies. What do you think they're going to do with the money? Oh, the government says it's about growth, it's about creating jobs. No, it isn't. It's about absorbing that money into their pockets, into their business; and we, the middle class, have to pay for that. That's what that is: We, the middle class, have to pay for \$2.2 billion or \$2.4 billion of corporate tax cuts. That is, my friends, the way the Liberals like it. That's Conservative politics. He, they and Jim Flaherty and Harper have this locked up. They like it. They're going to try to present it to you as a modern, Liberal, left budget. It's nothing of the sort.

There is, by the way, a one-time cheque. Actually, there will be instalments for families earning under \$160,000. You can nod, because that's what you're doing. It's one time or three instalments. But the whacking and the hit you're going to get when you go to the hairstylist and when you buy that doughnut and when you buy gasoline is going to be forever. The government says it's not about raising income. Oh? Why not? Why would any government introduce a consumption tax if not to raise money from the middle class? They pretend. They stand up here and say, "No, this is not about raising more money." Oh, really? What is it about? It is about whacking me when I go have a cappuccino and when I buy a doughnut and when I go to the hairstylist and when I go and buy gasoline or any fuel. You do that because you want it to be revenue-neutral? Come on. Do you think people are stupid, for God's sake? They are not that dumb.

You're getting \$4 billion from Flaherty to shut you up, and that's why McGuinty doesn't criticize Harper or Flaherty. That's why they have a pact. They have a contract, and it's a Conservative contract, not to say boo about the agreement they made in private, in the back rooms. It's \$4 billion to shut themselves up, and with that money they're buying all of you off. Yes, you the citizens and, yes, you the consumers.

Mr. Mike Colle: Mr. Speaker, that's not parliamentary. I think he should withdraw that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Are you getting up on a point of order, the member from Eglinton—Lawrence?

Mr. Mike Colle: Yes. I think that term "buying off"—the Prime Minister of this country would never do such a thing. He should withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I've listened to some debates in here, and Speakers have allowed that terminology to be used, so I'd ask the honourable member to carry on.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thank you very much, Speaker. I love it when Speakers give us that flexibility when other Liberals try to shut us down. It's important.

So with the \$4 billion, they are shutting you up. It's one-time money. When that \$4 billion goes away, which they will use to buy everybody off, when that money blows away, you, the middle class, are going to be whacked forever—perpetually, in perpetuity. To the middle class in every riding across Ontario, it's about taking money from your pocket; yes, indeed. They say, "Oh, but we're lowering the tax bracket for those people who earn less than \$36,000 from 6% to 5%." They say, "We're helping the lowest-income people." No, that lowers my taxes. I don't need a tax cut. You need to tax me and you a little more. You're giving me a tax break. You're buying me off with the \$4 billion the federal government is giving us. This is insanity. The federal government, with the \$4 billion, is subsidizing—subsidizing—this particular problem, this harmonization, for a short while. Rather than taxing those individuals like us and those who make \$200,000, \$300,000 and \$400,000, you're giving us a tax break. You call that progressive, modern and bold? No. There is nothing bold about this budget. You are going to hurt the middle class forever. I want every Liberal MPP here to stand up and defend it. Don't get up for the two minutes and blah, blah, blah about all the great things you're doing for the left and for the poor little people. Stand up and say you support the corporate taxes, and that Dalton was wrong when he said it, and that now you're modern, and you understood it forever and that's what you always wanted. Stand up and say that. Go to your riding and defend the harmonization tax. I want to see you do that.

This consumption tax riles me. I hate consumption taxes. I support income taxes because they're fairer. They're based on the ability to pay. You should be forcing taxes out of people like us and people who make more than us. That's what you should be doing. Instead, what have you done and what do you continue to do? You shift from an income tax system and you go to consumption taxes. From now on, all the cities will go to consumption taxes because they won't have any money.

I tell you what: Tolls are coming everywhere. There's going to be a toll near you any day soon. Tolls are coming. That's another tax. You wait and see—with the blessing of the Liberal Party.

"Oh, no, the Liberals are so modern and so bold. This has nothing to do with left or right; this is just so non-political." This is the most Conservative budget I have ever seen.

I want the taxpayers and the citizens out there to join us as we defeat this lot of Liberals. By the way—but just support those Liberals who say they like harmonization. You've got to support them, because there aren't too many.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Unlike the honourable member from Trinity–Spadina, I am not cynical. I am in fact very pleased to be able to support our budget because I think it does a very balanced job of supporting families right now, when we're facing economic challenges, and

creating a climate that will attract investment to Ontario in the future.

I would like to talk about some of the things that we are doing to support families because, unlike the member for Trinity–Spadina, I think that's an important component of this budget. We are increasing the Ontario child benefit, which goes to all low-income families, so that it will be \$1,100 per child by this July. That's two years ahead of schedule. We're investing \$1 billion in affordable and social housing. That helps the people in our economy who are the most vulnerable and facing challenges in finding housing. We're decreasing personal income taxes for 93% of the people in Ontario. That helps everybody. It does help the middle class when you get a personal income tax cut. We're creating a permanent sales tax credit. Every man, woman and child will qualify for a \$260 personal sales tax credit, and that's permanent.

So, do I think this is a good budget? Absolutely. I do support the single sales tax and I support the corporate income tax cuts because they will create the climate that allows us to get investors to create new jobs in Ontario in the future. This is a very balanced budget, and I am very supportive of it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I always stay when I know the member from Trinity–Spadina is speaking, because he's always entertaining and always passionate. He speaks a lot in riddles, but he speaks, I think, quite sincerely. We all enjoy his interpretation of the world. I would say he's a joyful person. I spent some time with him. He sees the world through rose-coloured glasses, which is great. I think that's a great bit of levity here on a Thursday.

1740

I would say, though, that when I read the media—I'm just reading the headlines, so don't get bored here—he's partially right. Here's the Toronto Star article, and it says, "Harmonized Tax Idea Is Off Key." The Peterborough Examiner said, "It's Time to Play Name that Tax." That's the Peterborough Examiner, in Jeff Leal's riding. And there's the other one from the Hamilton Spectator: "On Borrowed Time; Ontario's Budget Motto: Spend Now, Pay Later."

The St. Catharines Standard says, "Wrong Time to be Picking our Pockets." And if I look in here, there's the Belleville Intelligencer, "More Smoke and Mirrors from McGuinty Liberals." Here's one from the Waterloo Record: "The Wrong Time for a Liberal Tax Grab." Here's the Ottawa Citizen, a respected paper: "Ontario Budgets for Six Years of Deficit."

I could go on and on, but the point here is that they have attacked the most vulnerable in society. This is why, as a person of the NDP stripe, he's very concerned about their homeless strategy, the poverty strategy—there isn't any money in that. There are tax cuts, and we can argue about what those are, Liberal or Conservative things, but he certainly made it clear. What he has here, though—this is from the Canadian Press: "Ontario Joins the Club,

Will Plunge into Deficits Totalling \$56.8 Billion over Seven Years." That's all borrowed money that has to be paid back.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: In my quick two minutes, I want to say that, first of all, this is a jobs budget. There's \$32 billion for building sewers, roads, transit. That goes into the pockets of people who are losing their jobs. It's the biggest infrastructure project in jobs for real people who need the jobs. The member from Durham doesn't accept that we need to create jobs. I almost want to take him on rather than my good friend from Trinity-Spadina there.

Then my friend from Trinity-Spadina had the gall to say he hates the consumption tax. His own party wrote us a letter saying they wanted to increase the consumption tax by \$2 billion. Remember that? They wanted to raise the provincial sales tax from 8% to 9%. Where was he when his great leader said, "Raise the consumption tax"? I didn't hear a squeak out of you to say anything about that. Shame on you for not saying anything on that. Shame on you.

We talk about helping the vulnerable. There is \$1.3 billion, the member from Durham, in housing, social housing fix-ups, increasing social housing that's already there, for the rent banks. The child benefit that he voted against—the member from Durham voted against the child benefit—is up to \$1,100 per child. If you have four kids, you get that four times. That means a lot to the working people and it means a lot to our vulnerable.

The final point, the member from Trinity-Spadina: We are in the middle of economic climate change. I don't know if he has noticed, but every country in this world is going through the same thing: huge economic destruction. You can't sit and look at the world through your rose-coloured glasses when the world is collapsing underneath your feet. You've got to do something—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further questions and comments?

Mr. Joe Dickson: It's a pleasure to rise on the budget. I'm thrilled. I had the privilege of doing a television debate with one of the future Conservative leadership candidates the night of the budget, and I was quite surprised at the number of phone calls I got. As a matter of fact, they had an independent panel made up of social workers, businesspeople and people at large, and they overwhelmingly supported the harmonization that we presented that day, and I got calls the next morning as well.

I have to tell you that in my area we're rather fortunate. We've increased the health staff. We've got a beautiful \$100-million expansion going on at our hospital that the province is paying 90% of. In education, we've got all of the basics: lower class sizes, higher test marks and 100,000 secondary students achieving graduation, which they were not doing before.

What are the cost savings? It's not addressed very well here. I have to tell you, as a business person, there's a multitude of cost savings that are long overdue. It is

going to cut the paperwork for businesses. It'll save up to \$500 million for businesses throughout Ontario, and it only makes sense. You're going to have one tax inspection, not two; you're only going to have one tax processing on a monthly basis; you're going to have less labour costs, and it goes on and on and on. It's a win-win situation.

I think everybody here knows that with the new cost reductions for business, the write-offs on capital equipment that will promote new business, what we're actually doing is creating new jobs and helping to assist in this worldwide phenomenon that has put us in a minor recession. It's nothing but positive news, the way Mr. Duncan and our Premier have come forward with this budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Trinity-Spadina has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The member from Durham says I speak in riddles, and I would like to say to him: What riddle did I tell, and which part of that riddle, whatever it was, was incomprehensible to him?

And the member from Guelph did not state once that she supports harmonization.

Mr. Mike Colle: She did.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, no, no. I listened. She did not say it.

I listened to the member from Eglinton-Lawrence. He didn't say it. I even listened to the member from Ajax-Pickering just a second ago, and he said, "I did a program and they"—the others calling in—"support it," and then only partially does he say, "This is going to be good for business because you're going to have only one filing system as opposed to two." But he didn't enthusiastically say, "This is good for me. I like it. I'm going to defend it." Not once. You're not going to find too many Liberals as cheerleaders; no, siree. There are at least 25%, 30% of them in that caucus afraid to death—at least. I guarantee it.

This is not going to be good for small business. It's not going to be good for the middle class, who are going to get whacked in perpetuity with consumption taxes on everything from energy to footwear to prepared foods under four bucks, tobacco and alcohol. Your wine is going to cost more. Your glass of red wine is going to cost a whole lot more, not less. So many—the list is too long to get into. And the businesses that are going to be affected: We don't know what impact of the 8% tax on the local café is going to be, the hairstylist or the barber, the health food store or the bicycle shop. We don't know that impact, but I can guarantee you, it's going to hurt. It's going to hurt a whole lot of people.

We are urging all the consumers out there, all the taxpayers, all the citizens: You've got to let these people know. They're worried and they're nervous and, with your voice, we can change that around.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm very happy to speak to this budget. Every budget has a context. To understand this

budget, it's important to understand the context of this budget. The context of the budget is the context of our economic times here in Canada, in North America and indeed in the world.

What's happened in this past six months? Last year the Ontario economy was motoring along nicely. We had balanced budgets. Everything was just fine. What's happened is through no fault of anyone here in Ontario, indeed in Canada. We are caught in a global economic meltdown.

For instance, I was reading in the financial papers today—the Wall Street Journal, the Globe and Mail and the National Post—that the numbers on the auto sector are out. In car manufacturing for all of the North American models, and indeed the Japanese cars that are manufactured here, the output and the sales have declined by about 48%, 49%.

Here in Ontario—and the reality is, and we have to face it—we survive on an export economy. Ontario's is an export economy. To whom do we export? We export cars to the US. We export all manner of auto parts to the US. We export all manner of manufactured goods. You just have to drive around the GTA, whether it's Toronto, Hamilton, Oshawa, Pickering, Cambridge, throughout the province, and the manufacturing base is collapsing. It is down, on average, 30%, 40% to 50%.

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Where does that leave us in the budget? How does that affect the budget? If we don't get this budget right, if we don't set the context, the framework, so that we can hang on to our manufacturing base, which is our export economy here, we're in serious, serious trouble. We've got to have a strategy to draw in and to hang on to our manufacturing base, because if we don't, it's either going to shut down or it's going to move to other jurisdictions. Here are some ways that we can do that. One of them, the most important, is captured in the budget. We have heard from the manufacturing economy—that's our export economy here in Ontario—that one of the things they are struggling against is the provincial sales tax and the federal tax. They say, and the fact is, that 130 other jurisdictions throughout the world, including four provinces in Canada—and I understand that BC is going to be moving to this model—have a harmonized sales tax. They've taken the provincial and the federal tax and rolled it into one. Why is that important? It's important because it makes the manufactured product, that auto part, those parts that go into a refrigerator that's manufactured—all of that manufacturing here in Ontario, which is the basis of our export economy, needs some help from this government. One way we can help is with the harmonization tax so that businesses will stay here, businesses will stay in business and, as we get through this recession, our manufacturing base will be even stronger. Without a strong manufacturing base, our export economy cannot survive. If we don't have an export economy based on a strong manufacturing base, we have fewer tax dollars coming in from the businesses and we've got less income tax coming in from the people

who work in those plants who are going to be laid off. If we haven't got the tax dollars coming in, guess what? We have real problems funding our social programs here in Ontario, our health, our education, our bridges and our roads. That's the context of the budget. That's why it's important to move to this harmonization: to shore up our manufacturing base, which is the heart of our export economy.

In addition to that, the budget recognizes that with the harmonization piece we're setting up to assist the manufacturing base, we have to do something for families—men and women, seniors, everybody working and living here in Ontario. We've got to help them deal with the harmonization tax. What have we done? We have a number of initiatives in, and you're all aware of them. First, there are a number of exemptions that we have negotiated with the federal government so that the harmonization addition will not apply to certain items, and you're well aware of those: children's clothing, books, feminine hygiene products and other products that are used on a day-to-day basis by families and by individuals here in Ontario. So we've attempted to soften, to ameliorate, the downside of the harmonization. That was a hard negotiation with the federal government, but the province went to bat and got those exemptions in place. It's the best of both worlds: We're helping manufacturers maintain our export economy here in Ontario, and we're helping individuals cope with the extra burden that will be on them because of the harmonization.

In addition to that, we have a program where taxpayers in Ontario are going to get rebates, and the rebates are spread over a number of years. There are other tax credits that individuals are going to get. That will offset some of the stresses of the harmonization.

But I come back to my main point: We all live in Ontario. We all have family who work in manufacturing jobs. Like it or not, that's the essence, the fundamental core of the Ontario economy. If we don't get that piece fixed, hang on to our manufacturing base and hang on to our export business, we have nothing in Ontario. We'll be in real difficulty.

But this budget will help us to hang on to that manufacturing base, to build a stronger economy, to keep sending our products to the 130 other countries in the world that we deal with and to continue to send our products to the United States. Some 85% of our exports go to the United States.

So those are the two things in the budget: shoring up the manufacturing base; offsetting some of the stresses that the harmonization is going to place on individuals. The third piece is: We've got to get money out there in the economy. We've got to create jobs.

That takes me to my last point that I want to make on the budget, and that's what I'll refer to as the stimulus package—\$32.5 billion that is going to go into a host of infrastructure projects and other stimulus initiatives. What are the criteria for those infrastructure projects that we're spending that \$32.5 billion on? The criteria, essentially, is that we want shovel-ready projects. These

aren't long-term projects where something is going to happen five years, 10 years or seven years down the road. The criteria is: Let's find projects that are shovel-ready; that is, we can get people out there on construction jobs, we can get people manufacturing cement and we can get people active in the lumber industry for the stimulus projects and all of the other things that go into the construction of large infrastructure projects. That piece is going to create some 300,000 jobs in this economy. It's going to get money out there in circulation.

Those three points, coming back to go over them again: shoring up our manufacturing base so we continue with our export economy—85% of our stuff manufactured goes offshore. We need that. We can't survive without that strong manufacturing base. The budget is designed to enhance that, to hang on to that. The budget has significant pieces in it to offset the anxieties and expenses that individuals are going to have to bear because of the harmonization rules. I've walked you through those: the rebates, the exemptions on various products. The third piece, of course, is the infrastructure stimulus package—\$32 billion out there, creating jobs. I suppose the other thing this budget does is that, in my view, it creates confidence.

I had a town hall meeting in Willowdale on the weekend, and people had a lot of questions about harmonization. They had a lot of questions and anxieties about manufacturing, layoffs and all of the things we've been reading about in the press. When I walked people through the context of the budget and why we had to approach the budget in the way we have, thoughtful

people understood it, and thoughtful people said, "You are on the right track. Save our manufacturing export economy. Get stimulus and infrastructure projects going. Get that \$32 billion out into the economy. We appreciate and welcome the efforts you've set out in the budget so that individual taxpayers find some amelioration in some of the side effects of the harmonization."

Overall, when I walked thoughtful people through that, they understood the context of the budget. They understood the three pillars of the budget, and at the end of that town hall meeting people spoke to me and said, "We understand that budget, Mr. Zimmer. Keep at it. Congratulate your colleagues." This budget gives Ontario citizens the expectation and the hope that we're going to pull through this recession together and that at the end of the recession we're going to have a stronger economy and we're going to have better infrastructure projects up and running, whether it's LRT or subways. People in Ontario are going to be assured that the tax revenues after the recession are going to come back, they're going to grow, and they can preserve the things that are near to their hearts: education, the health care system, roads, bridges. It makes Ontario a really satisfying place to live.

I'm very proud to speak to this budget and to endorse the core concept of the budget, given the very stressful economic time.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until next Monday at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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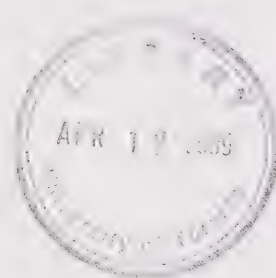
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Monday 6 April 2009

Lundi 6 avril 2009



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Honourable Steve Peters

Président
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 6 April 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 6 avril 2009

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. John Yakabuski: The guests have not arrived yet, but I want to introduce the family of page Daphnée Dubouchet-Olscheski. She's a page from the riding of Ottawa–Vanier, but most of her family hails from the beautiful, great town of Barry's Bay in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I know that her uncle Donald is going to be here, her aunt Gail, her aunt Constance, uncle Tom Nevendorff, cousin Elliot McMurchy, and of course her mum, Michelle Olscheski. So when they arrive, good to see you.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I take the opportunity to introduce a member in our gallery. We all know John McKay, the federal member from Scarborough–Guildwood, and a member of the federal Liberal caucus.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no further introductions, it is now time for oral questions.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: We have some very important guests who were supposed to be in the Speaker's gallery, and obviously they got delayed coming from a meeting to the gallery, but I would like to introduce them because they will be here shortly. We have a delegation from the RUSNANO corporation, which is a Russian organization exploiting, in the finest sense, nanotechnology. They are led by Alexander Losyukov, who is the deputy director general and who is leading this mission; Sergey Kalyuzhny, director of scientific technical expertise; Vladislav Chernov, principal councillor for international co-operation; and Alexey Pogorelov, project officer. They're accompanied by Nickolay Smirnov, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia; Andrey Veklenko, Russian Consul General in Toronto; Dr. Roman Mayev, director general, Institute for Diagnostic Imaging Research; and Michael Burton, the general manager, Institute for Diagnostic Imaging Research. They will be here shortly.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): They are in the east gallery. Welcome.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Today I would like to welcome Chioma, the publisher of AMOI magazine, to the Legislature.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ENERGY RATES

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Minister, one of the major concerns of many concerns is, at the end of the day, who bears the cost of your government's costly energy act, Bill 150. There's a huge amount of uncertainty, and the Premier and this minister have further muddled the waters on a number of occasions. They aren't helping seniors and families who are trying to pay their bills in terms of looking at the future.

Minister, is your harmonized tax grab going to apply to the increased costs of energy that hard-working Ontario families and seniors on fixed incomes are consuming? Is the HST going to be added to the energy audits you're already forcing on home sellers?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Our comprehensive tax reduction plan will provide consumers with one of the largest personal tax cuts in Ontario history. The Green Energy Act I believe will stimulate growth in the electricity sector, it will stimulate additional production of electricity and, of course, as we pursue growth in the supply of electricity, that will keep downward pressure on costs, recognizing the challenges ahead.

In terms of the single sales tax, there are a variety of goods, including electricity, which will be covered, as they are under the goods and services tax. But the off-setting corporate and personal tax cuts, as well as the transition payments, will help consumers with that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I asked a specific question and all I got was more obfuscation. I think it's only fair that this minister and other ministers in the government shed some light on this green disguise, and it's clear they're unwilling to do that.

A study by London Economics International shows that this legislation, Bill 150, is going to increase the average ratepayer's bill from a minimum of 15% to God knows how much. That's up to \$780 per year, Minister, and adding that onto the latest tax grab of a further 8% takes it up to over \$842. That's a far cry from the 1% and \$12 the minister indicated he hopes Ontarians are going to believe, in terms of what he said publicly. I know there's no reason to be cynical.

Minister, why don't you tell Ontarians the facts on this legislation? This amounts to nothing more than another new tax at a time when families can least afford it.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: The group the honourable member is relying upon for his analysis today I believe said before a press conference that they hadn't yet completed their analysis, but already the honourable member is relying upon it.

I would repeat to the honourable member, as I said to the critic from their party, that we'd be very happy to continue to offer briefings from the ministry that give insights into our expectations with respect to the Green Energy Act. It is about more renewable energy on the one hand, and about creating the opportunity, through conservation initiatives, for people to use less energy, whether in their homes or in institutions like this one. I'd be very happy, by way of supplementary, to give more information to the honourable member about how we believe Ontarians, through initiatives like time-of-use pricing, are actually going to be powerfully enhancing their ability to manage their electricity use very effectively.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: We released the early findings because committee hearings start today and because the conclusions are so alarming with respect to the contradictions in terms of what you've said publicly about this legislation.

Our caucus is anxious to create more green energy while building our environmental economy, but most importantly, we're anxious about being straight and honest with Ontario families, seniors and others on fixed incomes about the implications of this legislation. It appears to be, based on the early results of this study, another manipulative move on the part of your government, another tax grab that's going to hit families and seniors especially hard during tough, tough economic times.

Minister, I'm asking you, would you consider taking another look at this bill, perhaps pulling it off the table for now, looking at the real implications, then coming back to this House with legislation that will meet Ontario's future energy and environmental needs—a realistic approach to this issue?

Hon. George Smitherman: I note that in crafty doublespeak it took the honourable member less than 10 seconds. He said that they're anxious to see more green energy come to life and they're very anxious to do all they can to make sure that it doesn't happen. The point of the matter is that the Green Energy Act seeks to create the capacity for more renewable energy on the one hand and to reduce use on the other by supporting the emergence of a culture of conservation in the province of Ontario.

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I think most Ontarians do understand that energy and electricity prices are under pressure to rise; we've seen volatility in natural gas as an example. That's why the

smart meter and the evolution to time-of-use pricing, something that will become more and more known to Ontarians in the next number of months, is a powerful tool that will allow Ontarians to use electricity in those times of the day when it's particularly inexpensive. If we all manage our use well, then those times when there's a lot of demand, especially on hot days, we won't experience this extraordinary range of volatility in the pricing.

ENERGY RATES

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure as well. I think there's room for building green energy in the province of Ontario and still being honest with the people. I'd like to ask the minister: Who has been consulted, and how has he come to the conclusion that his Green Energy Act will add, as per his promise, only 1% a year to the cost of energy to consumers and will create 50,000 jobs? We have to ask, where did you obtain these numbers? Whom did you get them from? Whom did you consult? Who gave you those numbers? Tell us, please.

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to say to the honourable member that this is ground that we've had the chance to go over before, and I've taken the opportunity even beyond what happens here in question period to try and give the honourable member some further insight, because I saw that he was stuck at a certain point.

There are presumptions established in the Green Energy Act. We presume that, over a period from 2010 to 2012, an incremental \$5 billion will be invested in the emergence of green energy: in more renewables coming to life; in the transmission and distribution investments which are required; and in the efforts that we will make to enhance the capacity for you and me in the institutions like this one, and in our very homes, to use less electricity. All of those things combined, we anticipate an incremental 1% additional cost per year associated with the implementation of the Green Energy Act.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It seems that the minister is the one stuck—stuck in a hole; and good advice to anyone there is to stop digging. I didn't hear a name referred to. My question was whom the Premier and the minister have consulted. One has to wonder if maybe it was the very same ghosts that the Premier took advice from when he said he would close all Ontario coal plants by 2007.

London Economics International's latest study said that this Premier's ever-increasing energy costs would actually make Ontario less competitive than it already is, driving jobs out of the province. We've already seen over 300,000 manufacturing jobs leave this province under your watch. Minister, you're driving a stake further into the economic heart of this province and bringing Ontario further into the abyss of have-not status by scaring investment and new business away. Why don't you consider the real and true implications of your green disguise and focus on doing everything you can to encourage and retain investment here in the province of Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: On the matter of investment, it would be nice if the honourable member would stand in his place and acknowledge that through our efforts with respect to renewable energy just in the last few years, we've seen nearly \$4 billion of incremental investment in creating sources of green energy, along the lines of those near Kincardine that I participated with the local member in opening on Friday, a substantial investment on the part of Enbridge which has created strong employment, enhances the property tax base and gives landowners and farmers another source of much-needed revenue.

The honourable member's solutions are what? They campaigned on a promise as well to close coal, and now, through many of those members, in legislative debate they said no, they want to keep the coal plants open. But perhaps they believe in carbon capture, where they're going to take the smokestacks and turn them upside down. We believe in transforming to one of the cleanest, greenest platforms of energy in the jurisdictions that compete with us, and we believe we can help people to use less—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Not only does he want to keep digging that hole, he wants to muddy the waters that are flowing into it.

This government is using its majority—and we haven't heard any names yet, Minister—to force this bill through, limiting public hearings and keeping Ontarians in the dark on its real implications. The OPA website itself says the entire energy sector in this province employs 35,000 people. You're saying you're going to create 50,000 new jobs. Are you saying this bill is going to more than double the size of Ontario's energy sector? It's time to come clean. You said the act concerns only a portion of the electricity supply, but it's going to create 50,000 jobs. Where are you getting these numbers?

For the last time, stand up and tell this House and tell the people of Ontario, do you have somebody who is giving you these numbers, or are you just inventing them like everything else?

Hon. George Smitherman: It's ample evidence of the benefit of giving opposition members three days off in a row. They get more opportunity for rehearsal.

I think one of the things that's important—the honourable member talks about process. I'm very, very pleased that the legislative committee is going to act. They added two night sittings for those legislative hearings at the request of the opposition. Those were granted. We look forward to many, many people coming forward.

What we didn't hear from the honourable member is what several of their members have said during debate. They believe in keeping coal plants open. Where are you? Be on the record around this. We know that we can eliminate them and we're making very good progress.

At the heart of the issue of the jobs that are created, the member must look as well to the retrofit initiatives. This isn't just a bill about creating more green energy; it's about making the investments in our homes and in

buildings like our schools and our public housing to allow them to use electricity. That's part of the solution—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Deputy Premier. The budget tabled last month finally reveals the government's true colours. It's a budget that forks over more than \$2 billion to banks and insurance companies while picking the pockets of hard-working Ontarians. It's a budget that adds 8% to home heating and gas bills but allows CEOs to take millions of dollars in unearned bonuses. Will this government now admit that its budget takes from hard-working Ontarians and gives to those who need it the least?

Hon. George Smitherman: The Minister of Finance will by supplementary have an opportunity to respond, but as one who represents rather a lot of people in our province who live in more marginal circumstances, they saw in the budget several initiatives which spoke directly to their needs. Our government's commitment, which outstrips any promise they've ever made, to make investments in the retrofit of social housing, stands as one very, very good example of the investments that we're making in people who live in marginal circumstances. The substantial near doubling of the Ontario child benefit is a mechanism that provides families that make less than \$30,000, no matter what the sources, with important support for their children.

There are other matters in the budget that the honourable member, the Minister of Finance, will by way of supplementary have an opportunity to address. But I've been speaking to my constituents, many of whom live in more challenging circumstances. They see many, many elements of the budget which are very beneficial to their circumstances.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This budget hurts real people with real lives, people like Alvaro, who is married, with a daughter. For 24 years he worked at a Toronto furnishing company. He was laid off last year. He found another job, but was laid off again after only four and a half months. Alvaro doesn't understand why this government is shovelling billions to large corporations while he is desperate to find a job to support his family.

How does this government justify the billions going to large corporations while Alvaro and thousands like him scramble to keep a roof over their heads and feed their families?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: From the leader of the party that wants to raise the PST by 1%, that's a pretty bizarre question.

I would suggest to the member that she look at the \$10.6 billion in personal tax cuts. I would ask the member for Parkdale-High Park how many of her constituents work in the financial services sector. I would

ask the member for Trinity-Spadina what they have against those bank tellers, what they have against the 400,000 people in financial services in the greater Toronto area—it's one of the fastest-growing workplaces. I think the Toronto members should stand up for their constituents, tens of thousands of people who have gotten new jobs.

This budget is the right balance that will help us through these very challenging times and create the jobs of the new economy. That member and her party are way behind the times. Unfortunately, they won't stand up for the 400,000 people right here in Toronto who work in financial—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The reality is that families are going to be forced to pay 8% more at the gas pump and 8% more for home heating—that's the reality—families like Persaud's family. He has exhausted his EI, he doesn't have a high school education and he's trying to transition into his new job. But in the meanwhile there's no money coming in, and he has a family to support. How does this government explain to people like Persaud that it's good economics to hand over \$2 billion to large corporations while he struggles to make ends meet in this province?

1050

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'd like to just rely on somebody named Hugh Mackenzie for advice on this. Here is what Hugh Mackenzie said: "Ontario's 2009-10 budget establishes the right direction for the next few years. It provides substantial economic stimulus. It is consistent with the new orthodoxy that relies heavily on governments to help rebuild damaged economies. It imposes some coherence on an incoherent federal plan."

We agree with you on employment insurance; unfortunately, the federal government has not responded on that. We will continue to urge them to do that. But again I would say to the leader of the third party, please stop attacking the men and women who work in financial services here in Toronto. It is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the economy. Whether it's the teller on the front line, whether it's the clerk in the back office, those people have good-paying jobs. This budget will—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question? Leader of the third party.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Acting Premier. This budget sides with large corporations and against Ontario families. It gives away billions to companies that need it the least, while nickel-and-diming hard-working Ontarians. The \$2-billion corporate tax give away to profitable corporations is bad economics, and it reveals a government that cares only about big business and not about everyday Ontarians. Will this government admit that when big business says, "Jump", it says, "How high?"

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Let me read to the leader of the third party what Pat Capponi of the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction said: "This budget has moved the bar forward on housing, tax credits and child benefits in ways that will make a tangible difference in the lives of many Ontarians."

Let me read to her what Gail Nyberg of the Daily Bread Food Bank said: "If you're a low-income Ontarian this is a positive budget, and I congratulate the government on recognizing that you can fight poverty and stimulate the economic scene at the same time."

This budget strikes the right balance. We need companies that employ people. We need companies that grow. We will continue to encourage the growth in employment here in Toronto in the financial services sector. We will continue to make the investments—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I want to talk about someone else I met in my travels around Ontario: Jaime, a father of one girl and two boys. He worked for 25 years at Fenco before the company picked up and moved to Mexico. The union and Fenco had a three-year contract but the company did not fulfill its obligations when it downsized and shut down without any warning at all. How do you explain to Jaime that in a budget that added 8% to his heating bill and shovelled \$2 billion to large corporations there were no measures—not a single measure in that budget—to ensure that laid-off Ontarians get the money that is legally owed to them?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Let me be clear that our government is always concerned with the rights of employees. We will ensure that all businesses, all employers, abide by those rights.

I think what the member is talking about is the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act. The member knows full well that is an act that sits with the federal government. We have asked that the federal government help employees by moving them to super creditor status. My predecessors and I have written and advocated for the wage earner protection program to be enhanced, and we will continue to do that. We will continue to work with the federal government, press them to change the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, as well as enrich the wage earner protection program.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This budget makes it very clear that there are two opposed philosophies operating in this House. On the one side we have a Conservative-Liberal government that believes whatever powerful interests want, they should get. On the other side, we have the New Democratic Party that opposes corporate tax giveaways, opposes an 8% increase on the essentials, and fights for real investments that create real jobs for the people of this province. New Democrats chose to side with hard-working Ontarians. Why is this government choosing to side against them?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I think last week the Premier spoke very clearly: This is not about left, it's not about right; it's about moving forward.

Let's be clear with that member. That member, her party and a number of other members have spoken to bringing forward what would be a tax on all Ontario businesses that would cost us many, many jobs across this province. That would be irresponsible.

So what we have done is we have moved forward with a very balanced approach, with a budget to address the needs of our most vulnerable workers, but also to position us as a strong jurisdiction and to add new jobs, more jobs, in all sectors.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Health. Last week, it was revealed that the Smart Systems for Health Agency was quietly abolished last September, after spending \$647 million of hard-earned taxpayers' money. Since 2003, the agency spent more than \$45,000 on food for consultants, \$753,000 on travel expenses for consultants and \$231,000 on hotels for consultants. I wonder who the consultants are.

Last week, the Minister of Health asserted that I can find all of the specific breakdowns of these lavish expenses, including the renovations of the new CEO's office, in public accounts. Well, I've checked. Here is public accounts. There is no breakdown. I ask the minister to point out where these specific lavish—

Hon. David Caplan: As is the custom, all expenditures of government, whether it's through third party agencies or directly, are contained in public accounts. In fact, the member has the opportunity to come to public accounts and to question the ministry about any of those particular expenditures. I think the fact that in five years this member has not chosen to ask about those expenditures speaks a lot about the inability of this member to do her job.

I can tell you that my predecessor decided, quite appropriately, to bring an operational review of the Smart Systems for Health Agency. The Deloitte study was reviewed by the Auditor General, and he found that study quite sufficient. I took the initiative, in fact, to collapse this agency and to create eHealth Ontario. eHealth is led by CEO Sarah Kramer and it's chaired by Dr. Alan Hudson, who also does our wait times. I have tremendous confidence that they are driving out an eHealth agenda for the province of Ontario so—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Well, the minister doesn't even want to talk about the agency. He knows there's no breakdown in public accounts. I would call upon him to tell the truth, and nothing but the truth, from here on in.

Minister, on April 2 you told a group of reporters that you had spoken to the senior management of eHealth and you told them to show restraint. Well, I'll tell you how much restraint there has been.

In the first three months of the new agency's existence, nearly \$40,000 on food for employees and consul-

ants, more than \$108,000 on travel expenses for employees and consultants, and you must have had quite a Christmas party, because there was more than \$48,000 for catering. That's three months. Minister, would you tell taxpayers and the more than 300,000 people who have lost their jobs why you find this spending acceptable?

Hon. David Caplan: I think it's perfectly acceptable to bring Ontario into a future that has electronic health records. I think tackling diabetes to prevent complications and keeping out of hospital is an appropriate expenditure. I think improving the safety and the accuracy of prescription medication is an appropriate expenditure for government. I think that ensuring that patients are treated with the most appropriate care settings, making the system more effective and improving the quality of care is an appropriate expenditure. I'm sorry that the member opposite does not share these goals and does not share the desire to implement the system that will give the ability to do it.

Now, Smart Systems for Health did in fact accomplish a number of goals. It helped to build and connect approximately 7,000 secure network sites in all hospital sites, in public health units and satellite sites, in family health teams and other physicians, in continuing care agencies, in pharmacies, in Cancer Care Ontario, the cardiac care—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1100

ORGAN DONATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Health. Kaylee Wallace-Vitelli was born in February diagnosed with terminal Joubert syndrome. Her parents and family have seen their little girl struggle for life over the past two months. They have now made the courageous decision to donate Kaylee's heart to another infant, Lillian O'Conner, but red tape is getting in the way. Will this minister step in so that both of these families can get what they so desperately want and need?

Hon. David Caplan: You know, our heart goes out to all families of children, and these ones in particular, who are experiencing these very harrowing circumstances. These are matters, I think, in which we would all rely upon clinical experts to provide their best advice about how to be able to help both of these infants, and all infants in the province of Ontario. I don't think that any member of this Legislature would expect a Minister of Health, who is a layperson, essentially, to be able to go in and say which medical procedures and how those procedures should be performed and to what extent that interference would be appropriate. I know that no member of this Legislature would want to suggest an inappropriate intervention in a medical matter by, essentially, a layperson. I know that we all, on all sides of the House, have tremendous compassion and hope and understand-

ing for the people of Ontario and the parents who are faced with these tremendously difficult circumstances.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Wallace-Vitelli family wants to turn Kaylee's tragedy into Lillian's miracle, but to do so they are being forced to resort to the courts. It's unconscionable. Both the Wallace-Vitelli and the O'Conner families are coping through incredibly difficult and heartbreaking circumstances. Why won't this minister act today and allow them to do what they think is right, preserving one life while paying tribute to another one?

Hon. David Caplan: Listen, I certainly have tremendous sympathy and admiration for the family which is going through a tremendously difficult situation with a child that they have, and admire the courage they have to make the decision for organ donation. I rely upon the advice of medical experts in what are the most appropriate steps that should be taken in order to be able to help all of these children. That is the appropriate thing to do. I don't think it is a political exercise, but rather it is one where we receive the best medical advice and take the appropriate steps and support these families in the very best way that we possibly can. I know that the member opposite would not want to suggest that politicians should be deciding these things, but rather these should be in the hands of medical professionals, people who have spent their lives providing the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

ST. LAWRENCE PARKS COMMISSION

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: My question is for the Minister of Tourism. As a member from eastern Ontario, I know that the St. Lawrence corridor is vital to the tourism industry in the area and the province. The corridor is rich in history and culture, and is important to the province and the country as a whole. It boasts the beautiful Thousand Islands, farmland, orchards, vibrant towns and cities, cultural centres, museums and world-renowned historic sites.

The 2009 Ontario budget announced on March 26 outlined funding for the revitalization of this area. Can the minister tell the House what this means to the St. Lawrence corridor and for the tourism industry in the province?

L'hon. Monique M. Smith: Merci à mon ami de Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, et félicitations pour ton bon travail la semaine dernière avec le Parlement jeunesse.

I am pleased to speak to the House today about my wonderful trip to the St. Lawrence Parks Commission on Friday and the announcements that we made there, which are going to help the St. Lawrence Parks Commission become an even greater world-class attraction.

On Friday, I was at the St. Lawrence Parks Commission in Morrisburg at Upper Canada Village. I met with Pat Macdonald, the general manager, and Peter Watson, the chair of the commission. I was also in Kingston and had a chance to meet with the staff at Fort Henry. We announced on Friday that, should the budget pass, the

McGuinty government proposes to invest \$23 million in the revitalization of some of the attractions at the St. Lawrence Parks Commission, which is an agency of my ministry. The investments will contribute to the economic prosperity of communities along the St. Lawrence corridor as well as throughout eastern Ontario. We are very excited about these investments.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I understand that the St. Lawrence Parks Commission has many tourist attractions and offerings throughout eastern Ontario; after all, it's part of the eastern gateway to Ontario. The commission extends from west of Kingston to near the Quebec border, and I understand it holds thousands of hectares of parkland and several attractions on the St. Lawrence heritage corridor that provide a major source of recreational opportunity for residents and visitors to eastern Ontario. Can the minister provide more information on what the \$23 million is allocated to, given that the commission has numerous attractions?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Yes. The St. Lawrence Parks Commission covers a great deal of territory and has some incredible vistas and beautiful parkland, as well as some really important historical sites.

On Friday, we announced that we would be investing \$13 million at Upper Canada Village and Crysler Park. This will be to update the visitors' centre, the retail outlet and the exhibits at Upper Canada Village. As well, we're investing \$7 million to invigorate the tourism experience at the Battle of Crysler's Farm, in preparation for our bicentennial commemoration of the War of 1812.

We then went on, on this very rainy day, to Kingston, where I was joined by the member from Kingston and the Islands for a \$10-million announcement at Fort Henry. This will see the construction of the state-of-the-art visitors' centre and upgrading of the retail outlet, as well as enhancing the sunset ceremonies. I want to thank Jim Brownell and John Gerretsen for a wonderful day at the St. Lawrence Parks—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The member from Nepean—Carleton.

TAXATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: To the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services: Death and taxes might be inevitable, but thanks to the Liberals' HST plan, your government is putting a 13% death tax on all funeral service costs, from caskets to tombstones. Will you exempt the bereaved and dying from this 13% death tax, or will you favour the much lower 5% GST: yes or no?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Let me say this: I am very proud of the budget that was presented by the Minister of Finance. It strikes a very exact balance that we need to keep our economy moving at this point in time. This budget has actually \$10.6 billion worth of tax savings for Ontarians, and out of that, \$4 billion in cash payments to 6.5 million Ontario families and individuals. Families making less than \$160,000 will get about \$1,000 in the

HST rebate in the transitional year and about \$260 worth of tax credits going forward as well. These are some of the measures that are being taken in order to offset the impact of the HST harmonization, or the single tax, as we call it—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: What I got out of that is that your government is going to tax us to the grave and now you want to tax us to death. On July 10, 2010, Ontarians will be paying a 13% tax on funeral services, a 13% tax on caskets, a 13% tax on flowers and, yes, a 13% tax on final resting places. Under the Liberal HST plan, the bereaved and the dying will have to dish out 8% more on their funeral services. That could be at least \$1,200 per bereaved family. Since you won't exempt the dying and the bereaved from paying a 13% increase in death taxes, will you commit to Ontarians today in this chamber that you will grandfather at the 5% GST funeral home contracts that have been sold or will be sold by July 1, 2010?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: What we really need right now is to make sure that our province becomes very competitive and we can get out of this global challenge that we are facing at this point in time. The single tax system that is being supported in this budget is actually a step in the right direction to make our province competitive as we move forward. It's not only that we are advocating it; the federal government is supporting us in this. They are giving us some of the transition money so that we can help consumers to do that. The other provinces have done it, and all have actually reaped benefits of that. So I really want to encourage the member on the other side to really see the benefits of the single sales tax as we move forward and make our province more competitive.

1110

EDUCATION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Education. The Ministry of Education website school finder is set up to allow parents to compare schools in the province. Why would the government provide information that would facilitate the ranking of schools based on the number of lower-income households or the university education of their parents?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What the school information finder is set up to do is to allow parents to find information about schools. It's about profiles of schools. It's all public information; it's information that's available in various sources. What we've done is brought it together. We know that, up until now, some boards have had profiles of schools; other boards have not. What we've done is provided an opportunity for schools across the province to have a profile on this website. We've known for many years that parents don't just want narrow information about test scores, they want a broader, contextualized set of information, and that's what this website allows for.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Minister, your school website includes the number of special education students, the number of children whose first language is not English and the number of recent immigrants. Why would parents want to know that kind of information?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to be clear that this information finder is not about ranking schools. I want to read a quote from the online survey from a newcomer. This person says, "I am so grateful for all this information—as a newcomer to Canada who came here to give my children a better future—this info was critical—I had to collect most of it myself three years ago. Please, please keep this information ... I represent at least 30% ... of parents in Ontario who came from a different country and home language—we need this information to make suitable choices for our children's education...."

She goes on to say, "I'd like to know about extra-curricular activities offered at each school."

Further: "Everyone gains when statistical information is shared."

I want to make the point that I have had a conversation with folks from People for Education and from the federations. It may be that we add more information to this school information finder, and I'll be talking with folks at the partnership table this afternoon about just that.

ABORIGINAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dave Levac: My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. The minister spoke recently in the Legislature about the importance of including First Nations in the recovery of Ontario's economy. However, aboriginal people often face challenges when it comes to their engagement in economic activities. First Nations and Metis communities must often contend with challenges of distance, climate, relatively small and dispersed populations, as well as significant community infrastructure needs, including water, all-season roads, limited services and, especially, adequate housing. I've also heard from the First Nations members in my riding of how communities might struggle to balance the need for commercial and economic development with the traditional values of environmental stewardship.

Minister, can you tell us how our government accommodates this need to balance the traditional values and the need for commercial growth and economic development?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The challenges the member notes are real and significant, as is the reference he makes to the connection many aboriginal people feel to the land and surrounding natural resources. That connection, frankly, is a reflection of the uniqueness of First Nation and Metis culture, and it's something this government makes every effort to respect. Striking that balance between environmental sustainability and economic growth is something we need to work on with our aborig-

inal partners through consultation and dialogue. We do have an obligation, constitutionally, to consult, but we have to go beyond that. It's not only the right thing to do, it's the best thing to do in terms of moving economic development opportunities forward. That consultation also involves encouraging partnerships, and that's why I'm so pleased, and aboriginal communities are so pleased, with our government's commitment to the \$250-million loan guarantee program—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Dave Levac: The minister and I recently had the pleasure of attending a ribbon-cutting ceremony at RJ Ecosafe Homes, at the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. We learned about how this company, established in 2008, has developed an environmentally sound, energy-efficient, durable, non-wood-burning system suitable for First Nations communities, especially in remote areas, and beyond First Nations for general public use. The company builds houses and also provides training for those First Nations people in communities across Canada so that those who are certified can return to their own communities and build these very modern, exciting houses.

During the ceremony, you spoke about how this company could have a positive impact on all First Nations communities across the country at large and how it had set a positive example on many different levels. I'm excited about this possibility, and I know that within my riding it's generated an awful lot of interest. Minister, can you elaborate for us what you meant by assisting us in that aspect?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I share the member's excitement for this project within his own riding. It is indeed a very exciting project and extremely innovative.

To me, this company demonstrates that economic growth and environmental protection are not mutually exclusive. As our government is addressing environmental concerns through our Green Energy Act, RJ Ecosafe Homes continues to explore innovative, environmentally friendly, safe approaches to home building. What's remarkable about this company is that it very much reflects a lot of the nature of our recent budget. It's a great example of innovation. In fact, it stands as evidence that the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in First Nation communities. It's a great example of the next generation of jobs, a great example of job creation and economic development, along with the importance of incorporating the green economy. It also speaks powerfully to our government's energy conservation efforts.

I thank the member for his leadership in this area. I thank—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

BUTTONVILLE AIRPORT

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. On February 26, my colleague from Thornhill put the question to the minister about the im-

pending closing of the Buttonville airport as the result of the loss of some \$1.5 million of support from the GTAA. At that time, the minister stated very clearly that he believes that that airport is critical to the local economy as well as the economy of the GTA. He undertook to contact the federal Minister of Transport to see if he could at that time get support for the airport.

I would like to know from the minister, has he heard back from the Minister of Transport for the federal government? Is there going to be support for the Buttonville airport?

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member raises a very good question—and all the members who, particularly, represent the area north of Toronto, including Michael Chan, my colleague; Mr. Shurman, who asked the question in the House; and the member directing the question to me.

Buttonville airport, in my opinion, does play a significant role as an airport for a lot of different reasons, one of them being a backup as well to the main airport, Pearson International Airport. I was disappointed, although they make their decisions for various reasons, to see that this had happened.

I did communicate with the federal minister about it, by letter to John Baird, who, I would think, is equally concerned about that potential closing. I have not, to this point in time, received—or I have not seen—a letter of reply from him yet, but I know that he does have that concern, and I look forward with anticipation to his—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: I would like to direct my supplementary to the Minister of Economic Development.

Interjection.

Mr. Frank Klees: The reason I wanted to speak to the Minister of Economic Development is that the implication of this airport closing is the loss of some 300 direct jobs and a loss of some \$80 million directly in that local economy, at a time when the government is investing billions of dollars in infrastructure to stimulate the economy, at a time when the economic development ministry is investing millions of dollars to save jobs and create jobs.

Regardless of whether the federal government is decisive on this, will at least the Ontario government, through the Ministry of Economic Development, be prepared to invest the \$1.5 million to save 300 jobs and to save some \$80 million of economic enterprise in the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I cannot speak for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, but no doubt the question is heard and will be in Hansard, and he will deliberate upon it.

Airports are primarily the responsibility of the federal government. I think it's the hope of everyone in the Legislature that the federal government will see fit to investigate this matter appropriately, and if there's funding to be required or pressure to be applied, the federal government will do so.

1120

I can assure the member that those of us who are part of the Ontario government—and certainly I speak for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade—are interested in seeing that airport continue. As soon as we get a response from the federal government, we'll be in a better position to make decisions subsequent to that. I am optimistic that the federal government will respond positively and that Buttonville, as a result, will stay open.

TUITION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The University of Toronto is introducing a flat fee equivalent to the cost of five courses in the faculty of arts and sciences. This flat fee will apply whether students take three, four or five courses. Students at U of T are saying this is nothing more than a tuition hike. Students take three courses for a reason: They can't afford to pay for five courses, they can't take on more debt, they have family responsibilities, or they have to work. Some students will drop out, and some won't register at all. Minister, do you agree with the flat fee?

Hon. John Milloy: The honourable member raises a proposal that I've read bits and pieces of in the media. At the end of the day, I think he recognizes that any tuition formula that comes forward has to comply with the Ontario government's tuition fee framework. That not only limits the amount of tuition increase that can take place for any program but also mandates universities to offer additional student assistance to any student who is facing financial obstacles moving forward.

I'm very proud of the fact that our government came in and invested \$1.5 billion in additional student assistance for students across the province and has worked with institutions to make sure that financial obstacles never prevent any student from going to university or college.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I had asked the minister whether he agreed or disagreed with the flat fee, and he didn't answer that simple question. I don't agree with the flat fee; New Democrats don't agree; University of Toronto students don't agree. Students taking three or four courses and paying for five is simply not fair. I want to know, and students want to know, do you, as a Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, agree with the flat fee?

Hon. John Milloy: What I agree with is a funding framework, which was introduced several years ago, which protects students against massive tuition fee increases and also mandates institutions to bring forward additional student support.

I'm very proud of the fact that we are a government that doubled student assistance. I'm also very proud of the fact that we are a government that reintroduced upfront grants for students. The honourable member, I'm sure, is very familiar with upfront grants, because he was part of a government which cancelled them.

HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question today is for the Minister of Transportation. It is that time of year again; it's pothole complaint time. While road maintenance issues with the 401 have been brought to my attention throughout the winter, it seems that with the melting of snow and the increase of temperatures, there has also been an increase in the number of calls to my office about the state of our roads.

I know that this government works hard to keep Ontario's roads safe, but to me and many of the residents living in Durham, it would appear that this has been one of the worst winters for road damage to cars and trucks in Ontario's history. In fact, I myself have had three windshields cracked these past few months while driving on the 401, due to flying debris, and I paid for them myself.

I'm bringing this to the attention of the Minister of Transportation in the hopes that he can please share with the House and all those who drive on Ontario's highways what the province is doing to minimize the factors which lead to vehicle damage.

Hon. James J. Bradley: An excellent question. The member for Ajax-Pickering has raised a concern I've heard from many residents, as I do at this time of year, right across the province. I want to assure the member and all Ontarians that maintaining the condition of our provincial highway system is a priority for our ministry.

During the winter months, as you would know, severe changes in temperature cause freezing and thawing of the pavement. This can result in the rapid deterioration of road surfaces and the creation of numerous potholes. As a result of the harsh winter conditions that were experienced this past winter, there were sections of Highway 401, including those through Durham, which suffered pavement damage. I cannot say for certain if this has been the worst winter. What I can say is that the effectiveness of normal measures is not necessarily there.

As an interim measure, MTO contractors milled the top layer of asphalt in order to create a smoother ride until the weather conditions allow—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'm pleased to hear that the minister recognizes there is an issue here and that his ministry has undertaken measures to mitigate the effects of winter's harsh effects on Ontario's roads.

That being said, I've heard from my constituents that the work being done so far is not enough. The milling of the roads is much appreciated; however, it has left small rocks and pieces of asphalt that, when vehicles drive over at high speed, will then fly up and hit the vehicles. There are people who regularly drive the portion of the 401 located in my riding, between Whites Road and Lake Ridge Road, as well as other portions of Durham region. I'm hearing from those individuals about chipped paint, chipped windshields and other minor damages.

I wonder if the minister could please share with this House what his ministry is doing to fix our roads, and for

those in my riding who damage their vehicles, who to speak to about repairing the damages.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The ministry realizes that more work needs to be done, and that's why we have tendered and awarded \$4 million in contracts to repave the areas in the greater Toronto area where the milling has taken place. The member from Ajax-Pickering will be pleased to know that this includes a contract of approximately \$1 million awarded for the repaving of milled areas in the Durham region. In order for the roads to be fixed as quickly as possible, we will extend the length of our overnight closures for the repaving to take place.

If damage has occurred to an individual's vehicle, they can contact the Ministry of Government Services for information on how to make a claim. If the public wants to advise the MTO of hazardous road conditions, they can do so by e-mail or telephone and that information is available on the MTO website.

So to you and regional councillor Bill McLean, I think we have a thorough answer—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a question for the Minister of Health. Today, Stats Canada reported a 38% drop in the value of building permits in Ontario. Specifically, the report pointed to a decline in medical infrastructure building. These stats are a good indication of future building activity in Canada, but in Ontario the future seems eerily quiet.

For more than a year, the minister has said that the new Trafalgar hospital in Oakville was delayed due to a lack of construction capacity. To me, the StatsCan numbers indicate there is ample construction capacity in the province of Ontario. Minister, can you promise the people of Oakville to renew construction of their hospital this spring?

Hon. David Caplan: No. In fact, we had laid out a plan that was called ReNew Ontario, which had over 100 hospital capital projects. It's a renaissance of infrastructure like this province has never seen before, I say to the member opposite. We have many of those projects in the ground today and they are proceeding accordingly.

Infrastructure Ontario, the body that is charged with being able to manage the procurement and driving out the delivery of these projects, did a market capacity survey. What they were able to find was, yes, we have put out so much work that we do have a challenge around construction capacity. Hence, we have rescoped the time when Trafalgar Memorial will go ahead.

I say to the member that we very much want to see this project move ahead as expeditiously as possible. If there is ability to move it forward quickly, the Ministry of Health is very supportive of working with my colleague the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure to do so.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Well, the minister says he's building a lot of hospitals. I guess the people in this House have a choice: We can believe what the minister says or we can believe what Stats Canada says. I think I come down on the side of Stats Canada.

The same situation exists up the road in Milton. An expansion plan for the Milton District Hospital was submitted in September of last year, seven months ago. But there is still no answer from the government. They're sitting on that report. In Milton the population is exploding under your 2005 Places to Grow Act, but the hospital can't keep up.

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In five years, your government has doubled revenues through taxes like the health premium; you're running a record deficit, borrowing from the next generation; and now we have a slowing in medical construction. According to Stats Canada, there is an increased capacity to build in the province. Minister, given taxing and borrowing, given high unemployment rates and now construction slowdowns, will you turn your words into action and finally fix the health care crisis in Milton?

Hon. David Caplan: This government is well under way doing so. It would have been nice if the member, when he was on this side of the House, had advocated for Milton and for Oakville and their health care needs. Unfortunately, we had deafening silence for eight years. What we have seen recently is his colleague Mr. Hudak, who vies for the leadership of their party, saying, "This \$32.5-billion spend that they're going to do on infrastructure—I don't think that's the right approach. It's too much." Tim Hudak clearly has it wrong, as does this member as well.

Interjection.

Hon. David Caplan: He most certainly did, I say to my friend from Renfrew: on TVO, the Agenda, on March 31, 2009.

Here's the reality: Conservatives, either when they're in government or when they're in opposition, don't support investment in infrastructure. It took this Premier and this government and members on this side of the House with the gumption to be able to get these projects—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. St. Joseph's hospital in Hamilton is cutting its outpatient physiotherapy services. Winnie Doyle, the vice-president of clinical programs at St. Joseph's hospital, said, "The Ministry of Health asked us to look at outpatient programs to see if there are any programs we are providing in the hospital that are provided in the community." She goes on to say, "Physio services are available in a number of private for-profit clinics in the community, so that was a consideration." But the McGuinty government delisted physiotherapy services, so people in Hamilton must pay out of

pocket for outpatient physio. My question is: Why did this government encourage St. Joseph's hospital to divest their outpatient physiotherapy services to the for-profit sector?

Hon. David Caplan: I thank the member for the question. Because St. Joe's is confident that physiotherapy services can be provided in the community, patients will get the care that they need. The hospital wanted to focus on doing the things that hospitals do best: acute care, surgeries and emergency care. Hospitals may fund physiotherapy services from the global budget, but whether they do and the extent of the service provided is determined by the hospital. For a period, the hospital continued to provide free outpatient physiotherapy services funded by the hospital global budget.

I can tell you that we've increased base funding for St. Joe's by more than \$80 million since 2003-04. That's a 30% increase. I would also point out that this member and her colleagues have opposed these types of supports for St. Joe's and other hospitals in the province of Ontario consistently. I hope that this member will begin to support the investments in—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I can't agree with the minister saying that people can get access to physiotherapy in the community. You can only do this if you have the money to pay for those services, and most people don't. For low-earner Ontarians and for people who don't have private physiotherapy clinics, they have to go without. St. Joseph's Healthcare is joining a long list of hospitals, including Hamilton Health Sciences, Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital and Grimsby's West Lincoln hospital, that have already cut most of their outpatient physiotherapy on the urging of this government.

In the long run, it makes no sense. Patients who can't afford to pay for physiotherapy out of pocket end up in pain and often end up back in the hospital. Their quality of life suffers. The question is: Why is the government so determined to completely privatize part of our health care system?

Hon. David Caplan: Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, if you just look to our hospital partners and the response that they had to the recent budget here in the province of Ontario: Tom Closson, the president of the Ontario Hospital Association, called the budget "a positive budget for Ontario's hospitals and patients." Closson also said, "By protecting hospital funding in 2009-10, the government is positioning hospitals to maintain access to high-quality health services in the challenging year ahead."

Other hospital leaders have echoed these kinds of sentiments. In fact, Murray Martin, CEO of Hamilton Health Sciences, called the base funding increase "very, very good news."

It has been because of the support of this Premier, this finance minister and members on this side of the House that hospitals today are experiencing unprecedented levels of financial support from their provincial government. That's in—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The time for question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1136 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CAMP 30

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to rise today and place on the record the historic significance of Camp 30 in Bowmanville. Camp 30 is the only known intact camp for German prisoners of war still left in the world. Camp 30 was the prisoner-of-war camp for more than 800 of the highest-ranking officials of the Third Reich captured by the Allies.

There are 18 buildings occupying over 40 hectares. Before and after World War II, the property was a training school for boys. Sadly, the cornerstone of the property, the main administration building, was heavily damaged by fire in the early morning of March 28. A second building about 200 metres away was also damaged.

Lynn Phillip-Hodgson is a local councillor from Port Perry and a recognized historian in my riding and has published several books. He described the fire "as a sad day for Canadian history." The fire comes at a time when our community has been considering, and I have been supporting, a plan to preserve the property. Clarington council had placed Camp 30 on its list of heritage buildings.

The fire is a significant loss and a reminder to all in our community, and indeed the province, of the fragility of local history. I urge everyone to support VAC-ACC and other organizations that work voluntarily to support architecture and conservation in our communities.

EARTHQUAKE IN ITALY

Mr. Mike Colle: Today, our thoughts and prayers go out to the victims, survivors and emergency response teams that are, as we speak, dealing with the tragic aftershocks of the earthquake that devastated the city of L'Aquila in Abruzzo, Italy, yesterday. With over 90 people killed, over 1,500 injured and tens of thousands left homeless, we can only hope that the rescue efforts are successful and the injured receive immediate care.

Ontario, with over one million Italian Canadians, must feel the pain in a very acute way. This is especially the case for those who are from the Abruzzo region of Italy and have relatives in the earthquake area as we speak. They have been directly and tragically affected by this horrendous event.

On behalf of all of us in the Ontario Legislature, Premier McGuinty and all Ontarians, our heartfelt condolences and prayers of hope and support go out to the people of Abruzzo and L'Aquila and the surrounding

villages in this most challenging of times. May God speed the rescue teams, and may those left injured and homeless receive the urgent care they require.

LITERACY AND BASIC SKILLS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: For months now, I have been asking the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the minister if they are going to increase the funding for community-based literacy programs—and I repeat, community-based literacy programs. There are 111 of these agencies in Ontario and they have been frozen at poverty levels for the last decade. At the same time, with over 300,000 manufacturing jobs being lost in Ontario over the past three years, the enrolment in these agencies is growing each and every day.

The government members supported my resolution in this House calling for an increase in funding due to enrolment. There was even additional funding for literacy in the recent budget. However, now we find that somehow the government will not announce any funding to community-based agencies until late June, after this House adjourns.

Who is in control of this ministry? It is shameful and a blemish on this province that the government is turning its back on agencies that contribute to economic development in this province. The McGuinty Liberal government is turning its back on the men and women who want a hand up, not a handout.

Please: They need their funding announced now, as soon as possible, because people will soon be laid off if we do not get funding immediately for these community-based agencies in the province of Ontario.

KOREAN-CANADIAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm honoured to rise today in recognition of the Korean-Canadian Symphony Orchestra. The orchestra was founded in 1987 and is, to my knowledge, the only ethnic community orchestra in Toronto that holds regular concerts. Over the years, I've had the pleasure of attending many of the concerts that have been held by the symphony. The symphony is under the direction of musical director Richard Lee, who also serves as the assistant director of the Quebec Symphony Orchestra.

The orchestra holds two concerts every year at George Weston Recital Hall at the Toronto Centre for the Arts in Willowdale. I attended the most recent concert, entitled the Unification Concert, this past Saturday with my colleague the Honourable Aileen Carroll, Minister of Culture. The minister was welcomed by Ms. Myung Sook Kim, the president of the symphony, who has done so much over the years for the symphony.

The Unification Concert has been themed in honour of special guest soloist Mr. Cheol-Woong Kim, who will be joining the symphony. Born and educated in North

Korea, he defected in search of freedom of expression in music. He was trained in Moscow at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory of music and now resides in Seoul and teaches at the Jansei Arts College in Seoul, and performs at numerous concerts in order to help his fellow defectors.

I urge all members of this assembly: If they want to experience a tremendous classical musical experience, they ought to attend the next symphony of the Korean-Canadian Symphony Orchestra.

LAMBTON GENERATING STATION

Mr. Robert Bailey: On Friday, my constituents and residents of the neighbouring riding were treated to the rhetorical excesses of the Deputy Premier when he came to the Sarnia-Lambton area to tell them what a great thing the McGuinty government was doing by closing down the Lambton generating station and throwing more than 300 of my constituents out of work.

This government wants to close Lambton down despite the fact that they have no idea how they are going to replace the generation capacity. By closing LGS, they will be in fact driving up the cost of electricity for all of us in Ontario, just when we need some stability for the electricity costs.

If the Deputy Premier wanted to brag about how they keep their promises, they should remember their solemn promise not to raise taxes. You don't hear them bragging about that one.

I will proudly keep up the fight to maintain the Lambton generating station, whether through biomass or any combination of feedstocks. This government's green plan for electricity won't come close to generating the electricity that our province needs, and until we can get more capacity online, they should stop the ill-considered move to close down Lambton generating station. Closing Lambton generating station is one promise this government should not keep.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I would like to take the opportunity to talk about an event that I attended a couple of weeks ago in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex. Branch 18 of the Royal Canadian Legion in Wallaceburg held an open house for the community in celebration of the recent installation of a greatly needed elevator at their home branch. The idea for this elevator was advanced by past president Pat Hagen, who recognized the need to make the legion accessible to our seniors and, most especially, our veterans.

We know that accessibility is a constant struggle for many people, and so often it hinders their ability to be actively involved in their community. This legion made it a priority to ensure that they were able to accommodate these people and, in doing so, has allowed many past

legion members to return to a place where they are comfortable and welcomed.

Many people worked together to make this idea a reality. Dedicated volunteers raised funds and, with an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant, the legion obtained the \$100,000 needed to fund the project. Those who worked tirelessly on this have finally seen it to fruition, and I was glad to be there to celebrate with them and to see their hard work as it was brought forward.

By installing an elevator, something that many of us take for granted, this legion has been able to improve the lives of people in our community in a tangible and practical way. I want to thank them and commend them for their efforts.

AJAX ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS WEEK

Mr. Joe Dickson: I rise in the House today to highlight an important upcoming event taking place in my riding of Ajax-Pickering. From April 17 to 26, we are holding our 22nd annual Ajax Environmental Affairs Week.

During this week, there will be a multitude of activities, including opportunities for Ajax residents to get involved in cleaning up and plantings and expanding our environment. There will be planned eco-waste pickup days at various locations, most notably the giant litter pickup at our Ajax waterfront. There will be tree and wildflower plantings, free compost giveaways and eco-fair seminars for residents, including the new Green Energy Act, to learn more about the role they play in keeping our environment healthy and green, as well as expanding it. We encourage everyone to participate. This will also be a prime opportunity for our government to communicate our new environmental initiatives like the Green Energy Act.

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Since I founded Ajax Environmental Affairs Week back in 1988—when, unfortunately, I was the only person who actually showed up—this has now expanded to become a highly successful vehicle, with over 1,000 volunteers each year, for environmental education and with a focus on greening our community, thinking globally and acting locally.

Some of our past chairs include Martin Olenroot, Ray Trempe, Deanna Fry, Sherry Brown, Elizabeth Lockett, Bob Bailey, Alan Birks and Margaret Cecconet. Of course, we thank the mayor and all members of Ajax council for this activity, continuing the many years of their activity in Ajax.

NORTHERN HOME REPAIR PROGRAM

M^{me} France Gélinas: Today, I would like to talk about the unfairness of the northern home repair program. The program provides interest-free, forgivable loans to northerners with low and modest incomes in

order to make important upgrades to their homes and increase energy efficiency. Sounds pretty good so far, but the problem is that some of my constituents in the low- and modest-income brackets own manufactured mobile homes.

In my riding of Nickel Belt, there are about 20 mobile home parks which are home to hundreds of families. Unlike regular homeowners, mobile homeowners do not own the land that their home is situated upon. The repair program requires some form of collateral, like a mortgage registration or a lien, to ensure that the program's conditions are met. Requiring a mortgage as collateral prevents mobile homeowners from applying because land ownership is required to register a mortgage.

There are other forms of collateral that mobile homeowners could use to provide assurance that the program conditions are met. While this round of applications has closed, I would suggest, in the view of fairness, that in future rounds of the northern home repair program or similar programs the government find ways of ensuring that mobile homeowners are eligible. Ricky, Julian and Bubbles need energy-efficient windows and doors, too.

TOWN OF KINMOUNT

Mr. Rick Johnson: I'm honoured to rise in the House to announce that April 1, 2009, was the 150th anniversary of the day that the town of Kinmount, located in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, received its official recognition from Canada Post. Kinmount, a town of 500 residents, has a long, proud history, and is located on the Burnt River in the northeast corner of the city of Kawartha Lakes.

The Austin sawmill, originally built in 1874 to service the logging industry, has played a huge role in the town's history, and although it is in need of renovations, like a James Lumbers painting, it still stands on the bank of the river as a historic reminder of our proud heritage.

Kinmount became one of the first Icelandic settlements in Canada in 1875, and that fact has been recognized with a designation as a national historic site.

Today, Kinmount is the centre for cottagers in the area. It is home to the famous Highlands Cinemas. Built by owner Keith Stata, it is a 550-seat, multiscreen movie theatre, and a museum that is a fixture in cottage country from May to Thanksgiving.

The Artisans Marketplace is a showcase of the talents of local artists and is a must-see on any visit to the town. It was established in the late 1990s by Bruce and Patti Fleury and members of the Kinmount and Area Artisans Guild.

Labour Day weekend is the weekend that cottage country residents make their way to the Kinmount Fair to celebrate the end of summer. Its unique setting makes it one of the quaintest fairs in Ontario.

I wish to congratulate Diane Austin and the members of the sesquicentennial committee, as well as the residents of Kinmount for their proud history and their ongoing commitment to their community on this day, a recognition of their 150th birthday.

PETITIONS

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This petition regards property tax assessments.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontarians are angry over the volatility of the MPAC tax assessment system, the near impossibility to predict one’s assessment or to understand how it is arrived at, the patent unfairness of assessments and that the current system leaves many homeowners worried they may be forced to sell their homes; and

“Whereas changes are needed that will make Ontario’s property tax system stable, understandable, fair and sensitive to homeowners; and

“Whereas property assessments in Parkdale–High Park have risen between 28% and 45% between 2005 and 2008;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: Support the ‘freeze till sale’ plan to bring fairness to Ontario’s property tax system so that new assessments happen only at the time of sale and when a building permit is obtained for renovations totalling more than \$40,000.”

I couldn’t agree more, and I’m going to give this to legislative page Mark to be delivered.

HIGHWAY 17/174

ROUTE 17/174

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Another petition on the widening of Highway 17/174, and it keeps coming in.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Highway 17/174 needs to be expanded to four lanes from Trim Road to Prescott-Russell Regional Road 8 in order to enhance road safety; and

“Whereas Highway 17/174 has been known in the past for its hazardous condition and accident rate; and

“Whereas this highway represents the main artery for the working population of Clarence-Rockland, Alfred and Plantagenet and Hawkesbury to access the national capital; and

“Whereas the united counties of Prescott-Russell have demonstrated their interest in conducting the environmental assessment for the widening of Highway 17/174 by passing a council resolution;

« Attendu que la ville d’Ottawa a passé une résolution au conseil demandant soit à la province ou aux comtés-unis de Prescott-Russell de prendre l’initiative de l’étude environnementale pour la route 17/174;

« Attendu que le gouvernement fédéral et le gouvernement provincial se sont tous deux engagés à fournir 40 \$ millions pour l’élargissement de la route 17/174;

« Nous, soussignés, adressons à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario la pétition suivante :

« Nous demandons que les fonds nécessaires soient alloués aux comtés-unis de Prescott-Russell afin de

réaliser l’évaluation environnementale obligatoire à l’élargissement de la route 17/174 de deux à quatre voies, du chemin Trim à la route régionale Prescott-Russell 8. »

Avec plaisir, je rajoute ma signature.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: “Petition to the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario:

“Tay township, Simcoe county, in the riding of Simcoe North, has a population of 10,000 persons and a taxpayer base of 5,500. There are 2,144 sewer users and 3,038 water users. The burgeoning capital and operating costs as a result of provincially legislated rules and requirements are more than the limited number of taxpayers can afford.

“The following taxpayers petition the Legislature for relief with grant funds. Recent grant applications have all been turned down.”

I’m pleased to sign and support this on behalf of my constituents.

PROPERTY TAXATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the people of Sudbury.

“Whereas 2009 is a reassessment year in the province of Ontario; and

“Whereas the assessments will be phased in over a four-year period from 2009 to 2012; and

“Whereas the assessed values for current value assessments collected as at January 1, 2008, were obtained during years of high real estate activity in the province of Ontario; and

“Whereas the downturn in the current global economic climate has greatly affected the real estate market, and subsequently, the assessed values in the province of Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Minister of Finance for the province of Ontario roll back assessed values to the base year of January 1, 2005.”

I support this petition and will affix my name to it and send it to the table with page Sarah.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. Rick Johnson: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas a number of foreign worker and caregiver recruitment agencies have exploited vulnerable foreign workers; and

“Whereas foreign workers are subject to illegal fees and abuse at the hands of some of these unscrupulous recruiters; and

“Whereas the federal government in Ottawa has failed to protect foreign workers from these abuses; and

"Whereas, in Ontario, the former Conservative government deregulated and eliminated protection for foreign workers; and

"Whereas a great number of foreign workers and caregivers perform outstanding and difficult tasks on a daily basis in their work, with limited protection;

"We, the undersigned, support MPP Mike Colle's bill, the Caregiver and Foreign Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, 2009, and urge its speedy passage into law."

I affix my signature to this.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. John O'Toole: I am receiving literally thousands of petitions that read as follows:

"Whereas the proposed harmonization of the Ontario retail sales tax (RST) with the federal goods and services tax (GST) has the potential to increase the costs of many small businesses and their customers; and

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"Whereas these added costs would have a devastating impact in difficult economic times; and

"Organizations such as the Ontario Home Builders' Association have estimated that harmonization would add as much as \$15,000 in taxes to the price of a new home.

"Therefore we, the undersigned, reject the harmonization of GST and RST unless there are exemptions to offset the adverse impacts of harmonization so that the outcome will be a reduction in red tape, with no higher taxes."

I'm pleased to sign and support this on behalf of the thousands of constituents who are opposed to the harmonization tax.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Peter Kormos: I have a petition addressed:

"Whereas Ontarians are angry over the volatility of the property tax assessment system, the near impossibility to predict one's assessment or to understand how it is arrived at, the patent unfairness of assessments, and that the current system leaves many homeowners worried that they may be forced to sell their homes; and

"Whereas Ontarians are not complaining about paying taxes; we are complaining about a system which is volatile, unfair, unpredictable and punishing; and

"Whereas changes are needed that will make Ontario's property tax system stable, understandable, fair and sensitive to homeowners struggling on low incomes;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, support a 'freeze till sale' plan to bring fairness to Ontario's property tax system, uploading the provincially mandated programs that were downloaded under the Harris regime, the implementation of all of the Ontario Ombudsman's recommendations to reform MPAC, new assessments to happen only at the time of sale and when a building permit is obtained for renovations totalling more than \$40,000, the creation of a new category of seasonal prop-

erty owners within the broader category of residential properties, and the realignment of the multi-residential rental apartment building unit sector so that rental units are no longer assessed dramatically above the identical condo units."

I've affixed my signature.

I look forward to orders of the day, when Speaker DiNovo assumes the chair for the very first time, bringing a totally new style to the Speaker's role and inevitably a special charm here at Queen's Park.

RAILROAD BRIDGE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: After this performance—that was just great.

This is the second time I'm rising on a similar petition to improve the Bloor Street railroad bridge. It reads as follows—it's to the Minister of Transportation:

"Whereas the neighbourhood near 1369 Bloor Street West has been recognized as a priority revitalization area by a city of Toronto study in 2000;

"Whereas items for beautification include:

"(1) Developing terraced walls with flowers and planters near the railroad bridge;

"(2) Constructing new abutment walls;

"(3) Cleaning, painting and reconstructing the rusty, dilapidated railroad bridge; and

"(4) Creating brightly lit murals underneath the bridge in order to make it more secure and more people-friendly;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, request in the strongest terms that our city government immediately reactivate the 2000 reconstruction plan and CNR immediately proceed with improvements to the bridge" and that the provincial government support this plan.

"We look forward to a dynamic, revitalized community enhanced by a beautiful continuous cityscape. We want to be proud to live here."

Since I agree with this petition, I'm delighted to sign it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with health care in Almaguin. It's "The Burk's Falls Health Centre Petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Burk's Falls ... health centre provides vital health services for residents of Burk's Falls and the Almaguin Highlands of all ages, as well as seasonal residents and tourists; and

"Whereas the health centre helps to reduce demand on the Huntsville hospital emergency room; and

"Whereas the operating budget for Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is insufficient to meet the growing demand for service in the communities of Muskoka—East Parry Sound; and

"Whereas budget pressures could jeopardize continued operation of the Burk's Falls health centre;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government and Minister of Health provide adequate increases in the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to maintain current health services, including those provided by the Burk's Falls health centre."

I support this petition.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I have a petition here, and it's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the McGuinty government understands the present-day economic realities facing Ontario;

"Whereas the 2009 Ontario budget reflects the need to create and maintain jobs by proposing to spend \$32.5 billion in the next two years to build more public transit and improve existing infrastructure, all the while supporting and creating 300,000 jobs;

"Whereas workers are further being helped by additional job opportunities created in the green energy sector via the Green Energy and Green Economy Act that will, if passed, create 50,000 new jobs in the first three years of its existence;

"Whereas Ontarians who work hard each and every day to make ends meet will receive much-needed income tax relief in the form of a 17% tax cut to the tax rate in Ontario's lowest tax bracket from the current 6.05% to 5.05%;

"Whereas Ontario's future, represented by her children, will receive the Ontario child benefit two full years ahead of schedule, amounting to \$1,100 per eligible child;

"We, the undersigned, therefore applaud the McGuinty government for introducing a budget that protects all Ontarians during these very difficult economic times by investing in our greatest resource, our people."

I agree with this petition, affix my signature and give it to page Victoria, who's beside me today.

SALES TAX

Mr. John O'Toole: This petition sort of offsets the previous one. It reads as follows:

"Provincial sales tax holiday for purchasers of North American cars and trucks.

"Whereas potential new car and truck buyers in Ontario are having trouble accessing credit and loans; and

"Whereas the North American automotive industry is having difficulty selling vehicles, and the province of Ontario has recently lost more than 270,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector alone; and

"Whereas the auto industry in Canada supports an estimated 440,000 jobs, including many in the auto parts sector, and generates many billions of dollars in tax revenues;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Dalton McGuinty government to introduce a provincial sales tax holiday in the next provincial budget for the purchase of new, North American-produced vehicles sold in Ontario."

It looks like this petition is out of date because the budget has passed and there was nothing in it, but I will urge the government to act urgently.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I am rising in support of Bill 151 to stop the violence on public transit. It's addressed to the Parliament of Ontario and reads as follows:

"Whereas too many innocent people are being victimized by acts of violence while using public transit; and

"Whereas too many public transit employees are being victimized by acts of violence while working to serve the public; and

"Whereas we need to send a strong message of zero tolerance for violence on public transit; and

"Whereas anyone harming or carrying a weapon on public transit should be dealt with by the full force of the law; and

"Whereas public transit riders and workers have the right to ride and work on public transit free of violence, intimidation and harm;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to put an end to violence on public transit and totally support MPP Mike Colle's private member's bill," Bill 151, "to crack down on violence on public transit."

Since I support this bill 100%, I'm delighted to put my signature to it.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: To the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario:

"Tay township, Simcoe county, in the riding of Simcoe North, has a population of 10,000 persons and a taxpayer base of 5,500. There are 2,144 sewer users and 3,038 water users. The burgeoning capital and operating costs as a result of provincially legislated rules and requirements are more than the limited number of taxpayers can afford.

"The following taxpayers petition the Legislature for relief with grant funds. Recent grant applications have all been turned down."

I'm pleased to support this on behalf of my constituents.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREATER TORONTO AND HAMILTON AREA TRANSIT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU RÉSEAU DE TRANSPORT EN COMMUN DE LA RÉGION DU GRAND TORONTO ET DE HAMILTON

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 2, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 163, An Act to

amend the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority Act, 2006 / *Projet de loi 163, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la Régie des transports du grand Toronto.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the opportunity to speak today on this bill, the one that changes the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority Act that we debated a few years ago.

Before I proceed, I'll just note the new Speaker in the chair, the member for Parkdale–High Park.

Applause.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Congratulations. May you never have to throw me out, Speaker, although I can nominate some candidates in the chamber whom you would be happy to throw out.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: You know it's true.

Mr. Dave Levac: It's too important to have you here. They don't want you thrown out.

1330

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I know; I understand. I appreciate the concern of my colleagues in this chamber.

Madam Speaker, as you are well aware, the McGuinty government is failing the people of the greater Toronto area when it comes to dealing with transit and transportation issues. I want to talk about this bill, but before I talk about the bill, I want to talk about the context within which transportation decisions are made, not only here but in any jurisdiction.

If you are actually going to have a transportation system that works, first of all, you have to have an urban form, a city form that works, that has concentrations of particular activities and designated areas that have density, so that, in fact, transportation can be set up rationally to serve the needs of those who live in an area, and set up rationally to serve the needs of commerce and serve the needs of the environment. If you don't do that, everything you do after that is a band-aid, because if you have, as you have in the 905 now, an area where there's such a broad diffusion of uses mixed together, then it's very hard to say that there's one destination that is of critical mass, one that transit lines and transportation lines should pour into. This has consistently been a problem for those who are concerned about dealing with the transportation issue, not only in the broader GTA, but in large, sprawling cities around the world.

We went through this debate a few years ago in this chamber with the growth strategy for the greater Golden Horseshoe. The original plan that came forward was one that got a lot of critical support from those in the transportation arena and those in the environmental arena, because they saw it as advancing the cause of building a rational city form here in the GTA. Unfortunately, what happened is that, in the course of going through iterations and consultations—and I use “consultation” advisably—that plan was watered down dramatically, so that by the end, when it came before us here in this chamber, the Pembina Institute, which is widely recognized for its ability to do analysis of planning issues to deal with

environmental issues, and the Neptis Foundation, also widely recognized and praised for its analytical work, said that neither of them could, from the plan that was presented to the chamber, tell that this plan would make a difference over business as usual.

Business as usual in the GTA is projected to result in an increase of about 40% in travel times for residents over the next 20 years. So if it's taking you two hours to get from Hamilton to Toronto in the morning now, it's going to take you closer to three hours 20 years from now. That's the reality of the urban form that we're developing in the GTA and the greater Golden Horseshoe. Frankly, if that's the reality of the urban form, it doesn't matter a lot what kind of transit system you put in or what kind of subsidies you put into that transit system to make it work; you are going to have continuing paralysis and gridlock.

I was going to say that that's the context, but I need to go back just to give an example. The old city of Toronto and John Sewell, who used to be mayor of the city and still is a transit advocate and transit analyst, used to do presentations on the transit system in Toronto. The centre of what is now Toronto ran transit on a profitable basis back in the 1950s. There was enough density, and thus enough passengers on the streetcars and buses, that the system actually paid for itself. That's something that people find very hard to conceive of today. But in fact, that density was there and that transit system was able to generate that revenue. Thus, investment was made to keep building up that transit system because it could fund itself.

Then, as the old city of Toronto grew out into what was Metro and densities dropped, the densities in the newer part of the city required larger and larger subsidies to keep the system going. The new part of the GTA, the 905—new relatively speaking—has been built at densities comparable to or lower than those of Los Angeles. So no wonder we have difficulties with getting around: Los Angeles is not exactly a city known for easy traffic. In fact, it's an extraordinarily difficult place to get around in.

When the greater Golden Horseshoe growth plan was presented to us, the densities in the new areas that were prescribed by that plan were such that they would support transit going through an area every 30 minutes. I have to say to you and to those who are out there, I grew up on Hamilton Mountain—

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Yay—

Applause.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: And I remember—yes, yes. I appreciate the applause. I grew up on Hamilton Mountain, and the Upper Wellington bus comes about every 20 or 30 minutes. Well, I can tell you that there's tremendous demand for people to get cars, because people don't want to stand waiting at a bus stop for 20 to 30 minutes.

What has been put forward by the government in terms of urban form in the expanded city over the next few decades is not one that's actually going to change

demand for car use; it's going to continue to feed demand for car use. That's the foundation upon which any transportation plan has to be considered, and the foundation that we have is one of sand, not of stone; one that will be washed away, one that will be highly problematic as the world changes.

We already are facing substantial problems. People in this city are dying from air pollution, from smog. They want action, not only because people want to be healthy but because they want to get around, and at the same time, this government in power today is not doing what's needed to put in place an urban form that works and an efficient, cost-effective transit system that will supply or serve the GTA and Hamilton area.

The bill that's before us today, which enacts some provisions that were in the earlier Greater Toronto Transportation Authority bill that we debated a few years ago—which we were told at the time was the greatest thing since sliced bread and would resolve all the transit and transportation problems that have been bequeathed to man and woman—continues on that bill and puts GO Transit under the authority of the transportation authority. This is not going to substantially change the problems that are before us. In fact, in the Toronto area the transit system, notwithstanding recent announcements, has been in decline. Over the last 20 years, transit's share of all trips taken in Toronto has dropped by 10%. That's very substantial. Transit's share dropped by 10%. That's a very substantial move to greater car dependence. That's a far-reduced utilization of mass transit. Toronto has the most expensive monthly transit passes of any large North American city. So in fact there's a reality here that discourages people from taking transit, that says to them, "Do you know what? You're better off holding on to your car. You're better off coming down by car because it's very expensive to take the TTC."

I was called just recently by someone who doesn't live in Toronto, who lives in Vaughan, who would drive down into the city, park in a TTC lot and then take transit down to the centre of this city. That's being changed. Now, I can't blame the TTC; they're faced with ongoing financial difficulties. But this person who contacted me said, "You know, the simple reality for me is that if I come down from Vaughan, park in this parking lot, pay all day for parking and take transit down, it's cheaper for me just to drive all the way in." I don't know all the thinking that went on at the TTC board when they discussed this matter, but I think this person who contacted me had a reasonable point. If, in fact, for a lot of people who drive it's cheaper just to drive all the way in rather than drive, park, pay and take transit, then there will probably be more people who are going to take their car. That's a negative for us.

The ongoing underfunding of public transit in this province is hugely problematic, and we see it right here in this city. If you look at the underlying financial reality, the government of Ontario once paid more than half of transit operating costs. Now it pays less than a third. You,

Madam Speaker, and many others see the impact of that when you're on busy bus and streetcar lines. I've been on Jane Street trying to get a bus downtown and passed by bus after bus absolutely packed. Now, frankly, if there's that much utilization, you'd think you'd put on more lines, but the system has been so starved for cash that even where lines are packed, it costs the TTC to put on more service, and thus the service isn't there and it discourages people from taking transit.

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From 1990 to 2000, TTC fares almost doubled and overall bus and streetcar service dropped by 10% to 20%, resulting in crowded vehicles and locker waits—and I'm sure that you've been in those vehicles and you've had those waits. Between 1998 and 2004, TTC fares increased by 14% while the city's transit operating subsidy decreased by 17%. From 2004 to 2007, cash fares increased by 75 cents and the monthly pass reached over \$100. That cements the TTC's reputation as one of the most expensive public transit systems to ride when compared to other major North American cities—not good for our future. This does not bode well for the city and this urban region when the cost of transit is such that it discourages people from using the system.

Essentially, the reality is that TTC riders are paying more than they did in the past, and they're getting less. And after five years of Liberal governments, the TTC still gets far less provincial support than it needs. Capital spending on roads, by the way, has increased by 57%. You can see where this all leads: It leads to greater and greater use of the car, and less and less use of transit. That has broad implications for the public health of people in the city, it has broad implications for climate change, and it has broad implications in terms of economic activity because of cars, individual workers, trucks, and goods being stuck in traffic. Fare hikes mean more cars on the road, dirty air and more children with asthma.

This current car-based system is costing us billions of dollars a year in lost productivity. Transport Canada did a study in 2002 and found that current congestion in urban areas costs Canadians between \$2.3 billion and \$3.7 billion per year. That's a lot of money, a lot of wasted money, earnings that people would have in their pockets if in fact we had an urban form and a transportation system that was rational and served us in the way we needed to be served.

In the 2007 election our party called for a reinvestment in transit and a restoration of the 50% operating funds for public transit. That would have allowed cash-strapped municipalities, which were struggling with the high costs of provincially downloaded services, to actually put the money into transit that was needed—a quick, simple first step that would allow cities to address the climate change crisis and the municipal funding crisis.

We also see not only transit as a way to address the congestion crisis, but as a way to create well-paying jobs in Ontario. The Metrolinx report on congestion underlines this. The implementation of the full Metrolinx re-

gional transportation plan would create 430,000 jobs. Reduced congestion would create another 18,000 jobs. One of the things that's central to actually taking advantage of that job creation is to ensure that the rolling stock and the equipment that we buy to make sure that these mass transit systems are operative are made here in Ontario, made here in Canada. In the United States and in Mexico—NAFTA partners—they have a 50% floor on the components that have to be made domestically.

I had an opportunity a few months ago to talk to a fellow in Thunder Bay who worked for Bombardier, who's worked in the United States. He said they are very, very precise when it comes to making sure that their domestic content regulations are met and respected. There's no reason that we here in Ontario can't do the same thing, making sure that people in Ontario get the opportunity to work on this technology and make these vehicles. It's completely in compliance with all our trade agreements and trade regulations, it puts people to work, gives us the technological step up for what I think is going to be far more dominant in terms of transportation in this century. There is every reason to have that in there and, frankly, to have in the act a requirement that Metrolinx respect a much higher domestic content for purchase of rolling stock and equipment needed to make transit systems work.

It's not here in the act. It's ignoring a job creation opportunity in a province that everyone in this room and everyone who's watching knows is facing huge challenges—well, maybe it's more than challenges when you have the foundation of your economy crumbling. That may be a lot bigger than a challenge.

Right now the TTC is deciding what vendor it's going to use for its new streetcars. This is an opportunity not only for the TTC but for the province to say, "Do you know what? We can make those here in Ontario; we can make them in Thunder Bay. We can put people to work, and we, at the provincial level, will assist the city of Toronto in their purchasing, will assist them in making this happen so that we can put people to work in Thunder Bay." We need to do that, and this act needs to speak to that.

There is no question, Madam Speaker—I can see that you're enjoying your new role. I can see that. This is good.

There are a lot of reasons to move ahead with the transit plan in the GTA: economic reasons, environmental reasons, public health reasons. The question that we have to ask ourselves is: Will Bill 163, as it's written, speed the implementation of a regional transit plan or not? Will it put in place a transportation plan that will work or not?

The bill will create a single agency out of Metrolinx and GO Transit—that was already in the prior bill. The agency would have a board of directors from the private sector, not with elected officials, as is currently the case. I find this very troubling, and clearly the government doesn't. I think that when you are going to be setting up these kinds of bodies that set out regional directions, that

are going to have to negotiate their way through a thicket of political interests, having local elected representatives on there who can be called to account by the citizenry is of consequence. We don't need technocrats on these boards of directors; we can hire those. If we need someone to give us technical advice: Hire them, put them on the payroll, ask them the questions; if they don't give good advice, fire them. We don't need them on the board. We need people on the board who are responsive to the public, who know, from detailed, day-in/day-out work, what's going on in this region.

It's not clear to any of us—let's set aside whether or not you want technocrats or not on the board—whether this will actually speed up the adoption or implementation of a regional transportation plan. It's not clear that the existing Metrolinx board was actually dysfunctional. Why else would you get rid of it other than to say it was dysfunctional? But that's not clear. By most accounts, the board was functioning well. It had a good balance between urban and suburban perspectives. It had worked out good links with municipalities. It was asking challenging questions about weaknesses and The Big Move plan. It had developed expertise, and frankly, it had people on that board who had expertise from the political world and was starting to deal with substantive issues of revenue tools and specific priorities of the plan.

What we have now is a situation where key decisions have to be made, particularly as it becomes clear that not all the priority projects that people want will be funded. Will a new board with a significant number of new members be able to make those difficult decisions, will they make them in the interests of the region as a whole or will they make them in the interest of a very narrow group who may be focused entirely on, "What are the business opportunities in building transportation systems?" rather than, "How does a transportation system serve the needs of the people in this region?" Is it really beneficial to the board to get rid of the elected officials? The rationale for doing so—one has to ask.

It's interesting that Jeff Gray, who's the columnist on transit issues for the *Globe and Mail*, wrote an article this morning entitled, "What if Metrolinx Started to Matter After All?" Jeff, who has a dry sense of humour, talks about some of the more interesting moments in the history of the board, but he makes some very good notes and I want to put these on the record.

1350

He talks about how the government is saying it wants to move very quickly on regional transit. In the 2003 election, the Liberal Party promised to put in place a regional transit system. In 2007, when the legislation was introduced—two years later, that new regional body had produced a regional plan, but as Jeff Gray says, "And Mr. McGuinty keeps changing the rules of the game. In 2007, he overrode Metrolinx and picked out \$11.5 billion worth of transit projects he wanted to happen, making it unclear what the agency was needed for." Precisely. Why do you have these boards, why do you give them authority when in fact you're going to bypass them and put in what you

want when you want? You have to ask, what on earth is the function of this authority going to be if whenever it develops a plan, it's going to be bypassed in any event?

He says as well, "Final proof that it may not matter who sits on Metrolinx came last week, when, two days after he dismembered it, Mr. McGuinty promised \$9 billion for Mayor David Miller's transformative light-rail vision and York Region's groundbreaking Viva bus lanes." Well, there's that, eh? Why do you need the board at all if the Premier is going to say, "I'm going to have transit here, there"—frankly, I don't have any quarrel with the light-rail investments that are being made in Toronto. In fact, I give credit to David Miller and Adam Giambrone for the work that they've done setting the political table for this decision to be made, the people in this region who pressed and the people in the city of Toronto who pressed for investment in light rail. Again, I have to ask, what's the importance of this bill or even this board if in fact its presence is not needed to make substantial decisions about transit and transportation in the greater Toronto area? I'll leave his other comment about board meetings to my next point.

Second concern: Will the new board be accountable and transparent? There are certainly fears that future meetings will not be open. Jeff Gray says, "At least we journalists may not have to sit through as many Metrolinx meetings. It looks like the new body will be more likely to convene in secret, except when major policies are being passed." Frankly, when you go through the legislation, the section on when meetings may occur, it's interesting. Having been a city councillor in the past, all meetings are open except those specifically deemed to be closed; that was my experience as a municipal councillor. Here, meetings are deemed to be closed unless they're specifically legislated to be open. I think we're going to be in a situation, based on what we can see here, where people will have much less information about the transit system and how the decisions are made that ultimately shape their lives. That's of great consequence.

For example, under Bill 163, capital plans will no longer have to be made public. Why would you do that? Metrolinx didn't have the greatest record in consulting on capital projects. Staff have complained. Apparently staff have sometimes claimed to have consulted with municipalities when they haven't; so it has been said. A new requirement will only make such consultation much less likely.

Another concern: It's unclear whether a new regional super agency that's without municipal and regional representation will take into account local needs. Exactly. Many of the transit systems that Metrolinx oversees are of course regional, but Metrolinx will also oversee local transit systems such as subway extensions and new LRT lines. Local priorities can be very different from regional priorities. For example, the local priority might be to have numerous stops on a light-rail transit line with medium-density development along that line—say that fast. In contrast, the regional priority might be to have only a few stops and high-density development at the

nodes of those stops. How will Metrolinx, as a regional body, take into account those local concerns?

It's also unclear, and I mentioned this at the beginning, because it's the whole question of funding, that Metrolinx will resolve the financing issues. The Metrolinx regional transportation plan is slated to cost \$55 billion—a fair amount of money. There's no clear indication of where that money will come from. The Metrolinx board was going to wait five years before even discussing financing options. They had that length of time before they had to come forward with a proposal on how to deal with those costs. Even according to this bill, it will be at least another four years before we have a proposed investment model.

A lot of new projects have been announced, but as you're aware, those new projects in many cases depend on matching federal funds, which haven't come forward, and I'm thinking specifically of the subway line to York University. I was there for the announcement—well, it must have been one of a series of announcements over the years. I was there for the announcement a number of years ago, up in Downsview. It's still not moving, still not there.

If there have been problems in getting capital funds for transit projects, there has also been complete silence on how that larger, \$55-billion project will be dealt with.

Another issue is the whole question of owning assets. It raises concerns for me and anyone who looks at the bill. The bill appears to create a very large superstructure, in some ways like the greater Vancouver transit authority, a superboard that oversees and runs a variety of sub-entities. So we could see Metrolinx overseeing a body that owns subway lines, light rail and so on, all as part of a parent company.

One of the things that is disturbing and worrisome is the potential for all of this to allow Metrolinx to move to privatization of those bodies or, if not to complete privatization, to public-private partnerships. No one in this Legislature is interested in selling off the Spadina subway line. Is in fact the reality of this new entity that it can be used as a cover for that sort of public-private partnership or privatization of existing transit? We do need to move forward with public transit, and I underline the "public." We don't need a body whose function is going to be to expedite privatization of transit in this area.

If we look at P3s, not just in transportation but in health care, we've had huge problems with the Brampton hospital. Highway 407 is a corporation that many love to hate. The simple reality in dealing with P3s is that it is cheaper for public entities to borrow the money directly, hire companies to build whatever infrastructure they want, and then keep the ownership in public hands with public money. We don't need to turn over the ownership to private bodies. We've seen the legacy of private sector consultants with Metrolinx, which has been locked into an arguably overpriced contract for Presto smart-fare cards with consulting giant Accenture.

Next point: It's not clear that the new agency will be any better than Metrolinx in shifting the emphasis away

from highway expansion and toward public transit. We know that highway expansion acts like a magnet for new sprawl, which will only drive further expansion of those roads. We know that highway expansion removes significant vegetation, destroys wetlands and threatens groundwater recharge areas.

We know that we need to build communities that are sustainable and have transit systems, and that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, not encourage them. That means no new highways should be proposed until a viable transit option is available for those communities. Yet the regional transportation plan, even 25 years into the future, would still leave us so heavily reliant on highways that it won't significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, if we continue to build an urban form that is irrational and can't be served well by public transit, then there's no question that we will continue to have more and more demand for car-dependent or car-supporting infrastructure, with the air pollution and climate change that goes with that.

The regional transportation plan proposes new highway extensions north, east and west of the city to communities already fighting the problems of urban sprawl, and that could threaten community health and safety.

1400

Metrolinx has outlined transportation corridors under study, all of which appear to further new highway expansion. The major transportation corridors under consideration would connect the communities of Guelph and Bolton. That would bisect the greenbelt and put pressure to develop on protected agricultural and natural areas adjacent to the highway expansion. Again, the ongoing threats to the greenbelt, the ongoing chopping it up into smaller and smaller pieces, is not something that should be aided by this regional transportation authority—a huge problem.

The budget of two weeks ago shows the McGuinty government is still more committed to highways than transit, since it aims to increase highway spending, even as public transit is kept at the same plateau. The Ministry of Transportation needs to shift its focus from highway and road building to transit, pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. It should put a moratorium on all 400-series highway expansions while the Ministry of Transportation updates its modeling to incorporate present-day realities such as higher fuel prices, reduced demand for housing distant from urban cores and climate change impacts. It should shift money currently budgeted for 400-series highways to supporting the implementation of the Metrolinx provincial transit strategy, and should develop clear criteria for provincial infrastructure support to municipalities to ensure that funding is based on advancing the Metrolinx transit plan.

Finally, we need to make sure that Metrolinx supports, rather than undermines, strong local plans for transit. TTC has embarked on its Transit City plan, which proposes to build seven new light-rail rapid transit routes which, for those who aren't familiar with them, are streetcar lines with dedicated lanes. In total, 120 kilo-

metres of service will be added. By 2021, if fully built out, the new lines would carry 175 million riders per year. The estimated cost of building the Transit City routes is \$6 billion. The province is committed to significant funding through its MoveOntario 2020 plan.

The question that comes up, though, is where the money will come from for the city of Toronto to actually operate that system when it's fully put in place, given that it's already hard pressed to deal with its operating costs today. Metrolinx is looking at prioritizing subway expansion inside and outside Toronto over light-rail options in the city, and that has the potential to threaten the funding for light rail options that are the fastest, most cost-effective method for expanding transportation in this city.

The Yonge and Bloor lines have been a great success, but it's not clear that every subway expansion is really going to help us. The Sheppard subway line was built in an area with low density. Some density has been added, but the reality is that the government subsidy in 2005 for passengers on the Sheppard line was \$8 per rider compared with an average subsidy in the rest of Toronto of 47 cents per rider—a huge difference. If you don't have adequate density, if you don't have the transit lines put where there are people who will be taking the transit on a regular basis, then you stick a huge burden of subsidy on the city or the province. If we're actually going to reshape our transit lines, we have to be reshaping the density that's on those lines or in the region of those lines as we go forward.

If we are going to build an effective regional and local transit system, we have to go back to the drawing board and make sure we reshape the urban form to support it, and we have to make sure we have the bodies—democratically run, transparent, open and accountable—that citizens can actually interact with and call to account when things aren't working properly.

Madam Speaker, I'm sorry to say that I have another committee that I'm going to have to go to.

Interjection: No.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Notwithstanding the cries of distress from my colleagues in this chamber—I know they want so much more. I know you want much more.

Interjection: You're mesmerizing.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I can see that you are mesmerized by the glaze on your eyes.

There are substantial and fundamental problems with this bill. I know it's going to go forward to committee at some point, and maybe in the course of committee hearings some of those things will be sorted out. But at the moment there are very substantial problems that the government needs to address if this bill is actually ever going to be useful in terms of transportation and transit in the greater Toronto area.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I'm glad to comment on the member from Toronto-Danforth's comments on Bill 163, and I'm happy to rise in the House today to debate on

this legislation which, if passed, would merge GO Transit with Metrolinx and build transit faster and ease congestion, as well as create jobs.

I'm particularly happy because I believe Metrolinx would give the clout necessary to do its job in creating a seamless commuter network to serve the greater Toronto and Hamilton areas. In Brampton, that would mean finally upgrading our GO Georgetown expansion, which would provide all-day, two-way service from downtown Toronto to Brampton and Georgetown. That would be a wonderful thing.

As a former municipal councillor for 12 years, I know that sometimes when councillors have a transit or any other controversial decision, they delay; they defer. Those are not good things as we come into the next year or so with a municipal election looming over us. So I'm happy Metrolinx is here, because I think if politicians were still managing the regional transportation network of this province, we would still be sitting here a year from now with councillors who were unable to make a decision, paralyzed by the thought that they may upset some electorate. That's not a good thing. We need a group of people that can make transit decisions that benefit all of Ontario, can make them in a timely way, that have the authority to do it. In Brampton, that would mean two-way, all-day GO Transit service.

We're a city of over 500,000 people and we can't get down from Brampton to Toronto in a reasonable way. When I first started here five years ago, it was four trains down and four trains back, and that was it. There was no other choice. We now have GO bus service, but certainly a city of that size should have GO service all day, just as they do on the Lakeshore. So I welcome the fact that Metrolinx will have that authority. I'm optimistic and I have great faith they're going to be able to bring these projects forward in a timely way. I look forward to them being the individuals who will give us good advice and move the projects forward more quickly.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Parry Sound-Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to comment on the speech with regard to the Metrolinx bill that's before the Legislature. I would simply say that Ontario seems to be well behind the ball when compared to other areas around the world in terms of transit. If this bill helps us get more of a regional outlook where we can solve some of the problems, then I'm all for it.

I look at the system we have now where you have the TTC, which is certainly the biggest transit system in Ontario, using those crazy tokens that are my pet peeve, whether you're going a block or the whole length of the system, which doesn't seem to make any sense to me whatsoever. As well, I always lose them, so they're making a lot of money on me. Whenever I buy them, I end up buying 10 for one, it seems. But when you look at other places around the world, whether it be Hong Kong in 1988, when I was there, which had a card that would deduct value off for the distance were you going, or London, England, which has the Oyster card which can

be used on buses or their subway system—or Paris as well.

We need an integrated system so somebody can get on the GO train at Barrie and then switch to the TTC and use one card to get all the way to their final destination. Hopefully, this bill is going to get away from parochial thinking, where everyone's looking out for their own specific interests, and get to where we have a broader view where we improve the system for the betterment of the entire province.

I hope that we will be able, through this, to develop more of an integrated system that will make a lot more sense and get our province to catch up to so much of the rest of the world that is so far ahead of us.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and let me start by congratulating you for your new role. You look like you fit right in there.

It is my pleasure to make a few comments regarding the second reading of Bill 163 and the presentation that my colleague from Toronto-Danforth has done. It was certainly a good analysis that shows both the good sides of this bill and what needs to be looked at to make it a strong bill that would protect all of the people of Ontario.

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Certainly, he talked about the underfunding that is discouraging people from taking transit. The TTC is one of the most expensive forms of public transit to use, and we all know that price has a direct effect on the number of users. At the same time, we see a government that is quite willing to invest a lot of dollars on roads, which encourages people to use their cars, versus investing into public transit. Certainly, the percentage of public money going into transit has been decreasing, as he said, with stats that were quite eloquent in this regard. Basically, fare hikes spell nothing but trouble. Whether you look at the health consequences of them, with higher rates of asthma, or you look at the climate change effect or you look at congestion on our roads, it doesn't serve any of us well, yet it's not in the bill.

Another part that wasn't in the bill and that he was able to explain clearly is the "buy Ontario." If there's going to be lots of expansion, then there should be a requirement that part of those expenses are made in Ontario, or in Canada, if they cannot be made in Ontario.

A good presentation and good analysis. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Scarborough West.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Thank you. That's South-west, though the west is part of the riding.

I want to take this opportunity, first of all, to congratulate you on your new role and wish you all the best in the days and months and years to come.

I listened carefully to the thoughtful presentation given by the member from Toronto-Danforth, and we share a lot in common in that we both come and represent ridings here in Toronto. We know that transit is one of the highest priorities in this city and that it needs to be

fixed. This bill here, Bill 163, which we're debating today, addresses a lot of those concerns.

I just want to point out one line here which states that the corporation that will be created as a result of this act "is to provide leadership in the co-ordination, planning, financing and development of an integrated, multi-modal transportation network." It sounds like something out of Star Trek, but I think in simple, plain English, what we are trying to do is coordinate all the different services—the TTC, the GO train and all the other transit systems—so that people can move more easily throughout the GTA. That's the big issue, especially in my riding of Scarborough Southwest, where we have the Kennedy subway station as well as the starting point for the rapid transit.

This bill is nothing but good news, I think, especially when I think about people in Southwest. People who want to now use the RT are going to have a rapid transit system, a new system built over the next few years. Also, the proposed legislation will allow for a linkup with the airport. People have been asking me, "How is that going to happen?" I think the fact that we're going to build this line that runs from Kennedy station all the way to the airport is astounding; it's terrifically good news. It affects a lot of people in my riding and throughout Toronto. I support it, and I'm happy to stand today and speak in favour of it. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Nepean—Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you. It's a great opportunity to address this legislation. Obviously, Metrolinx is a very important—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Sorry; my mistake. The member from Toronto—Danforth has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I wanted to help you out.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the goodwill of the member from Nepean—Carleton in these matters.

My thanks to the members from Brampton—Springdale, Parry Sound—Muskoka, Nickel Belt and Scarborough Southwest for their commentary.

There's no question that we all want a transit system in the greater Golden Horseshoe area and the GTA that will help people move more easily. The question before us is whether or not this bill will facilitate that.

The member from Brampton—Springdale talked about the need to deal with the access to transportation from Brampton to get into downtown Toronto, a reasonable request. I have taken the GO train out to Brampton; it's incredibly convenient, but you're right: It doesn't run that frequently.

Do you actually need to remove all the elected officials from the board of directors of the transit authority to make sure that problem is dealt with? Well, apparently not. In fact, you don't even need a board of directors for the regional authority. The Premier designated that we were going to spend many billions of dollars on new transit investments—not bad decisions in and of themselves, but frankly, made without any need to consult any

board. If the Premier wanted to deal with the transit problem or the GO problem from Brampton to downtown Toronto, that could be dealt with now. We wouldn't have to be going through all of this.

The larger question is, will we have a plan for development in this urban area that will make sense and allow us to run a transit system that is cost-effective? That question is outside the scope of this act, but right now, the answer is no. Will this act actually make a substantial, positive improvement for running of regional transit because it makes the board or regional authority less transparent and less accountable? I have real concerns that it won't. I want to hear in committee exactly what the arguments are that would make anyone want to vote for it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and good luck with the tender mercies of this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate? The parliamentary assistant: Would she like to say a few words?

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: No further debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Ms. Jeffrey has moved second reading of Bill 163, An Act to amend the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority Act, 2006. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? Madam House leader for the government.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I would ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): So ordered.

REGULATED HEALTH PROFESSIONS AMENDMENT ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PROFESSIONS DE LA SANTÉ RÉGLEMENTÉES

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 24, 2009, on the motion for third reading of Bill 141, An Act to amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 141, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to start by saying thank you for the indulgence of this House. I was supposed to do my lead on March 24. Unfortunately, I had to attend a funeral. I debated a long time whether I should attend the funeral, because I didn't want this bill to be delayed. I attended the funeral of Len Kaattari. Len is a long-time family friend. When he was first married, he rented an apartment in the house of my in-laws. Their oldest son, Doug, was born in the same year that my husband was

born, and they have been friends ever since. Not a week goes by that we don't visit with the Kaattaris. So, after a Costco-sized box of Kleenex, I decided that I'd better attend the funeral so that I could be here now.

As I said, I hesitated because there is a sense of urgency in passing Bill 141. There is a sense of urgency, because I feel that the people of Ontario are presently at risk, and Bill 141 will help to close this. Bill 141 is the Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act. It is a good thing that this bill is coming forward, and it's also a very good thing that the government has agreed to vote in favour of the amendments that were put forward by the New Democrats and the Tories.

I want to talk a little bit about those amendments, because it will give you a flavour as to what this bill is trying to do. The first amendment has to do with the power of investigation. Right now, the College of Physicians and Surgeons is in front of the court with some of their members, some physicians who are being investigated, who do not agree that the college should have the power to investigate them, to ask questions and to do interviews.

The second amendment had to do with co-operation, that is, that every member or former member of the college shall co-operate fully with a person appointed to make an investigation. I cannot bring my mind around to it that we have to put those kinds of amendments in the bill. To me the college is, for every health professional, whether it be physicians and surgeons or nurses or physiotherapists, there to protect the people. So when your college comes knocking on your door as a member of a college to say that you are being investigated, it is your duty, as somebody who has a licence to practise health care in Ontario, to co-operate fully.

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But this is not the case. Some of the members are actually taking their college to court, with litigation that goes on for months and years. At the end of the day, why are they doing this? The only thing that I could see, from the depositions that came from the papers that were presented to us, was greed. Because there is money to be made, they are willing to take their college to court and they are willing to put the health and safety of the people of Ontario at risk. This is unacceptable to me. It was unacceptable to every member of the committee. So we put those amendments forward, and thankfully, the government agreed to it and included them in Bill 141.

There is no question that as health care consumers and health care providers there is no greater objective than ensuring patient safety. If you can do nothing else, do no harm. In fact, this is the express purpose of the Regulated Health Professions Act. This act, which was introduced in 1991, has had the following purpose: to protect the public from unqualified, incompetent and unfit practitioners, to encourage the provision of high-quality care, to allow the public the freedom to choose safe health care providers and promote flexibility in the role of health professionals to ensure maximum efficiency in the health care system.

Sometimes when I talk to people about what the colleges are there to do, I use this anecdote. And pick any health care professional. We'll say physicians. Just remember that 50% of physicians graduated in the bottom half of their class; 50% of nurses graduated in the bottom half of their class. The colleges are there so that there are no unqualified and incompetent people practising in Ontario. Their role is so important that it should go without saying that as a member of such a college, you have a duty to your college, because that duty is to provide safe care to the people of Ontario.

As the medical procedures and medical professions change over time, it is imperative that both the regulatory college as well as the province adjust to these changes and address any issue that could affect patient safety. While it seemed like a pretty good bill in 1991, we realized over the course of the decades since the bill came into power that more needed to be done.

Ontarians rely on regulatory colleges to ensure that patient safety is protected and the highest standards are met. From time to time, a gap emerges in the power of a regulated college and it is of very high importance that quick and decisive action is taken to close this gap. The bill before us today is part of a response to this gap, a gap that ended in tragedy. In September 2007, Krista Stryland, a Toronto real estate agent, a 32-year-old mother, underwent liposuction, a procedure in an out-of-hospital facility. Following the surgery, she went into cardiac arrest and died. The physician who performed Mrs. Stryland's liposuction was not a formally trained plastic surgeon. Plastic surgeons must have five years of specialized training and pass national exams to be certified as a specialist in plastic surgery by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. The physician who performed Mrs. Stryland's surgery had no hospital privileges; he was a general practitioner.

Mrs. Stryland's untimely death was a wake-up call for the province, for the college and for all of us that we must take a good look at the current system of regulations surrounding cosmetic surgery.

It is a great tragedy that nothing was done sooner to prevent her death, because in 1989, another such tragedy happened to a 44-year-old woman from Unionville, who died undergoing cosmetic surgery. There was an inquest into her death, and recommendations for greater regulation of cosmetic surgery were made way back then, in 1989. Unfortunately, there was very little change between 1989 and the other death, which happened in 2007. Today we have an opportunity to take a first step in closing that gap in oversight and patient safety.

While there is no question that Bill 141 is an important step, it's also a small step. It is unfortunate that the government has not acted faster. A year ago, the college submitted a number of regulations and bylaw amendments to the ministry, and it has taken until now for the government to come back with the needed amendment to the health professions act. However, we are happy that the bill is in front of us for third reading and, hopefully, will be voted upon favourably this afternoon.

This bill does not tackle so many of the other health issues affecting our province, and it does not tackle so many of the patient safety issues throughout all health care facilities. To date, we still lack the desperately needed Ombudsman oversight of our hospitals and long-term-care facilities. We still lack regulation for retirement homes. This province is still failing to provide seniors with a minimum standard of daily care in our long-term-care facilities.

While New Democrats are happy that the government listened to the concerns and recommendations of the CPSO, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, we are also all too aware that it is just one step of many needed to protect patients and people in Ontario.

One of the things that this bill did was highlight the need for action in the medical practice of cosmetic surgery. Some might say that cosmetic surgery is the Wild West of medical practice. This is true not only in Ontario but around the world. There have been deaths reported from Vietnam to Australia, from United Arab Emirates to Thailand.

It is likely no surprise to anyone here that we live in a world obsessed with beauty and the constant drive for perfection. Cosmetic surgery is something that more and more people are turning to as it becomes increasingly affordable and socially acceptable. It is the obligation of both the government and the regulatory colleges to understand these trends, keep current with them and ensure that safety is the primary concern of any cosmetic procedure.

According to a CPSO survey, cosmetic surgery procedures climbed 150% from 2002 to 2006. That's a lot of surgery. Toronto is the sixth-biggest market of cosmetic surgery in North America. That means there are an awful lot of people undergoing these types of surgeries, that, like every invasive surgery, are complex and come with risks. It is these patients who count on the college and the province to ensure their protection and safety.

Following the death of Mrs. Stryland, the College of Physicians and Surgeons moved quickly. They created regulatory change that would prevent a future tragedy like this. The College of Physicians and Surgeons recognized that the medical community had not kept pace with the expanded field of cosmetic surgery, and that patient safety in Ontario was compromised. People's health was at risk. They recognized the need to better monitor cosmetic surgery. Recognizing that you have a problem, I guess, is the first step in solving it, and the college should be commended for taking these actions.

CPSO conducted a survey of more than 2,400 of its members, asking if they had extended their practice to include cosmetic and aesthetic procedures without having obtained proper training. This is pretty serious. They were basically asking whether physicians were advertising themselves as cosmetic surgeons without informing their patients that they were not formally qualified to perform this surgery.

The results of this survey revealed that there were indeed physicians across the province who were perform-

ing procedures that they were not properly trained for. Following the results of this survey, CPSO moved on changes within their college to fill some of the gaps they had identified. For example, the college has now changed its policy of voluntary self-reporting, which resulted in some physicians, but not all of them, reporting undergoing the training, supervision and assessment required by the policy.

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In 2007, the college made it mandatory for all of its members to submit a detailed account of the cosmetic procedures they were providing to their patients. As well, a regulation will soon be forthcoming to limit the use of specialist titles such as cosmetic surgeon. The details of this policy change are still under way, and while we support a well-thought-out strategy, we urge both the college and the province to move as quickly as possible on this change, realizing that people's lives are at risk.

Potential patients have the right to a system and terminology that clearly distinguish between doctors with different training levels and specialties. The thought that a patient would think a physician has training and experience in a specific medical procedure when they do not is reason to move as quickly as possible in this direction. From all this work that CPSO completed following the tragic death of Mrs. Stryland, the college submitted recommendations to the Ministry of Health that have formed the basis of the bill before us today.

Many of the cosmetic procedures occurring this province are occurring in clinical settings outside of hospitals. Without this bill, the college has no right to go into these practices and directly observe physicians. This was one of the primary gaps identified by the college in the Regulated Health Professions Act, and was a limit on the college's ability to directly observe their members in practice. If you think about it, it is a very serious gap when it comes to medicine.

For professions like law or accounting, it is likely that virtually every major decision, and perhaps even the thought process of how a decision was made, is recorded on paper. If you have a question about why your accountant came to the conclusion they presented to you, they will likely be able to walk through a series of figures and columns that they have recorded and explain it to you.

This is not the same when it comes to medicine, and especially not the same when it comes to surgery. Surgery is a hands-on type of activity and partially intuitive, relying on sometimes split-second decisions, a type of thought process that may not be obvious from an external standpoint. Bill 141 lays the groundwork for observation.

Thanks to the work of the lobbying of the CPSO and the amendments brought forward by us in opposition, we have a stronger amended Bill 141. The college knew that merely observing a practice was not enough; more tools were needed. Bill 141 is now amended so that the college can interview physicians about their practice and any concerns that have risen through observation. The ability to interview physicians may make all the difference in

clarifying whether the physician or surgeon understands the implications of their practice or surgical procedure, and could help identify any gaps in knowledge before another tragedy or another accident happens.

New Democrats strongly believe in oversight. We believe in accountability of our health care facilities. We believe that Ontarians deserve a place to turn when something goes wrong for them or for a loved one across the medical system and the bureaucracy they have encountered. There is perhaps no more important an area of oversight of issues and services than one that affects their health and well-being.

It would seem that this government has an aversion to oversight, and this concerns us. New Democrats know that oversight is something we need to embrace and push forward, and that transparency is essential when it comes to health care issues. It brings with it accountability. That is why we have been pushing for Ombudsman oversight of this province's hospitals and long-term-care facilities in private member's bills, in question period and across the business of this House. Ombudsman André Marin has pushed to have his role as Ontario's independent public watchdog extended to include hospitals and long-term-care homes. As Ombudsman André Marin himself states, Ontario is the only province in Canada whose Ombudsman does not have a mandate to oversee hospitals. Despite this, Mr. Marin's office receives many serious complaints about hospitals every year that he cannot investigate. It is clear that we have another issue of oversight in front of us, and today we have an opportunity to put the appropriate structure in place to avoid future mistakes and needless deaths.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario has done excellent work on moving this issue forward. New Democrats are happy that this bill will likely pass third reading today, and we are happy to support it. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments? Further debate?

There being none, Mr. McMeekin has moved third reading of Bill 141. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Third reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Be it resolved that Bill 141 do now pass and be entitled as in the motion by Mr. McMeekin.

2009 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2009

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 2, 2009, on the amendment to the motion by Mr. Duncan that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a very sore voice today and it seems that I've been talking a little bit too much.

We're here to talk about the budget, and in my role as health critic for the NDP, I decided to focus a little bit as to the health impact of this budget.

Let me start by saying this budget has missed the mark when it comes to protecting the health of Ontarians. We need smart investment. We need a commitment to prevention and the courage to innovate the health care system. None of this will be feasible within the budget that has been put forward.

We also need a government that is willing to stand up and protect our publicly funded medicare system. This means more than just empty rhetoric about supporting medicare. This means a comprehensive and accessible public health system that is equipped with the resources required to meet the needs of the people of Ontario. But instead of a robust vision for the future of our health care system, all we see are recycled promises and dead ends. We do not see a response to the crisis in care faced across the health care system and requiring real and timely responses.

To start with, Ontario long-term-care facilities are unable to provide the care needed by their residents. Although the McGuinty government is fond of skirting the issue, the fact remains that without proper staffing levels there can be little promise of improved care. In the 2008-09 budget, long-term-care facilities were promised an extra 2,500 personal support workers and an extra 2,000 nurses. However, this promise of increased staff isn't likely to materialize before the end of 2011-12. The seniors in our long-term-care facilities today are being left out in the cold and having to wait.

Ontario Association of Not-For-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors—better known as OANHSS—CEO Donna Rubin had this to say about the budget: Residents of long-term-care facilities “can't wait three to four years to get the care they need today. Funding the remaining positions in this budget would have brought the sector up to an average of three ... hours of direct care per resident per day, which is the very minimum of where we need to be.” It is shameful that Ontario's poor status in providing adequate care to those in our long-term-care facilities is set to repeat for yet another year, that relief is not in sight for our vulnerable family members who call these facilities home.

1440

Our home care has fared no better in this year's budget. Home care services help keep people independent longer, they are an economical way of keeping our seniors healthier and they reduce the need for more expensive health-care services. Yet in this budget the government provides no assistance in reviving our failing home care system.

Reviving our home care system would have meant an immediate cancellation of the competitive bidding system. Competitive bidding has been a disaster for Ontario. It has placed profit above care. It encourages a system of cutthroat bidding rather than collaboration and best practice. It has compromised the quality of care provided to Ontarians and seriously undervalued and

undercompensated those dedicated to providing home care.

We need to move the home care system to a position where they can recruit and retain a stable workforce. Quality home care services are directly linked to continuity of care, and this can only happen when home care agencies are able to recruit and retain a stable workforce. But right now, what's happening is that they are forever recruiting and forever training new employees.

As you know, over 3,000 home care workers represented by SEIU, working for the Red Cross, are now on strike. I would say that most of what's needed to change this is available to the government without a big outlay of money, but the political will to do this is not there; the political will to look at what's ailing our home care system is not there. So the government has set the table for labour unrest.

In a part of our home care system where most of the patients are so frail, this is very worrisome to the people working for the Red Cross, to the members of SEIU. Members of SEIU are not making great demands. Most of them work for about \$12 an hour. All they're asking for is to be paid for their mileage when they go from one home to the next. I attended the picket line in Sudbury, where they were on strike. I talked to each and every one of the women—because make no mistake, most of them are women—who work hard. Home care is very hard work. You are there by yourself, helping somebody who often cannot help themselves.

In my riding, the distances are huge. One of the workers told me that she clocks about 900 kilometres every two weeks—she submits her time sheets every two weeks. Well, just think about how long it takes, in northern Ontario, to drive 900 kilometres. It takes hours and hours. She doesn't get paid for those hours of work. She only gets paid when she is in the house with the client. I cannot think of a single other worker we would ask to spend three or four hours a day on their job and not get paid for them. This is unthinkable, but this is what these women are doing day in and day out. Lots of the women who came and picketed actually got up earlier that day, went and made sure that their most vulnerable clients were looked after, and then came on the picket line. They did this because they basically care about the people they look after and they take great pride, but it is hard to stay committed to a job where it seems like nobody else cares. If we valued home care, we would treat those people with respect, which would mean paying them for the time they spend at work and compensating them for the mileage they put in to do that work, but we don't do either of these.

Red Cross workers who are on strike right now are lucky they are being represented by SEIU, but I would say large parts of the home care system are not organized; they're not being represented by a union; they don't have a voice. So what happens? As soon as the worker can find a job someplace else, they go.

In Sudbury, I would say lots of personal support workers that work in home care have their resumé in

everywhere else, because they know that they'll get better pay, a better job and better respect if they go to a hospital or a long-term-care facility. Home care is the poor cousin. Yet there is nothing in this budget to change this, nothing in this budget that would show that we value this part of the health care system, that home care has a role to play in Ontario—nothing. While the McGuinty government highlighted its already announced commitment to the aging-at-home strategy in this budget, the fact remains that without addressing the fundamental ills of the system, real progress will remain a distant reality.

In the 2008-09 budget, the McGuinty government promised to hire 9,000 additional nurses. That was received by every nursing association with a sigh of relief; everybody was happy. We knew that hiring was desperately needed throughout all of our health care facilities, throughout all of our health care systems. We need those 9,000 additional nurses, yet in the latest fall economic statement the health minister, Minister Caplan, said that this promise will have to wait. He has hinted that it would likely sit on the shelf until after the next election. So it is needed, but the government is not willing to finance it—not during this mandate. New Democrats have vocally opposed this misguided decision and know the dire consequences that the delay of these 9,000 nurses will have for the entire health care system.

Of course, at the centre of so much of this crisis are our hospitals. It is our hospitals that function as the final net for our health care system. They are the place where patients end up when they cannot be treated in other health care facilities. We rely on hospitals and their emergency rooms to provide adequate and timely care in a time of crisis. They are the backbone of many of our communities, and so very often it was our community that helped to build these institutions.

By following the budget, we now know that 70% of Ontario hospitals will be facing a deficit next year. This means that 70% of our province's hospitals will have to make cuts, and in most cases very deep cuts. As you remember, last week I read the names of a series of about 50 hospitals—I ran out of time before I could read them all—that have either cut nursing hours, failed to replace nursing positions that became vacant or straight out laid off nurses. Well, this is a scenario I'm afraid we're about to see rolled out more and more by more hospitals. We have already seen what this looks like in emergency rooms, in birthing units, in mental health and physiotherapy services shut down, leaving a crisis situation in far too many of our communities.

This morning, I presented the case of a hospital in Hamilton that has to balance their books. Although the government came through with the 2.1% increase to hospitals, it is not enough to meet the cost-of-living increase that the hospitals are facing. In order to balance their budget, they're looking at cuts. What this hospital has done is divest itself of its outpatient physiotherapy services. What does that mean? It means that people who need physiotherapy services will have to look for them in the community. It didn't sound that bad, except that in

the community, you have to pay for physiotherapy services.

1450

People access physiotherapy services most of the time because they're in pain. They have back pain, frozen shoulders, other musculoskeletal problems. They have enough pain that they cannot keep going on with their activities of daily living. This is triggers a visit to a doctor and a referral to a physiotherapy department. But unless you have a job that covers private physiotherapy or you are wealthy enough to access those services, then physiotherapy will be unavailable for most people in Ontario.

Not very many people are able to afford private physiotherapy. So what did they do? Before, they would get referred to the outpatient physio at the hospital. The hospital physiotherapy service visits were free to the patient who used them. So people who were in pain, people who needed help, could access the physiotherapy they needed to get better faster and go back to work. This is not the case anymore. As hospital after hospital is facing deficits, they balance their books by divesting themselves of outpatient physiotherapy, which has devastating impacts on low- and modest-income Ontarians who cannot afford those services.

The government may applaud itself for its 2.1% increase to the hospital budget. But the reality is that this increase will not meet the projected cost increases hospitals are facing; the hospital association put that increase at an average of 5%. The Ontario Health Coalition has said, "This budget does not provide even what is needed to maintain existing services, or save our local hospitals from major cuts." We are standing on the edge of a crisis with our hospitals, facing restructuring that has not been seen since the Mike Harris days. It is because of these issues that New Democrats are concerned about our ability to address the crisis in alternate-level-of-care patients: people who are in our hospitals, people who are in our acute care setting, which is not appropriate for their needs.

The real strategy addressing alternate level of care would first address the fundamentals of long-term care. It would address the broken home care system and our hospitals and the desperately needed regulatory framework for retirement homes. But these tough, yet necessary, actions are nowhere to be seen in that budget.

We are very concerned about this government's ability to ignore the good advice of the organizations and individuals who know the health care system best. We listened to the deputations at the pre-budget consultations. We listened as stakeholders presented balanced and innovative approaches that were tailored to the economic reality of our time. However, the budget contains none of these recommendations, and it will be the people of Ontario who suffer because of it.

New Democrats are concerned that we saw no real investment in preventive care—what we call the second stage of medicare. Health promotion remains the impoverished cousin of the health care system. Investment

in primary care continues to roll out at a snail's pace. We are still waiting for the vast majority of nurse practitioner clinics. There's one in my riding; I'm very happy about it. There have been three more announced, yet to be rolled out, but we were promised 25. The community health centres and aboriginal health access centres still do not have the funding that is required for them to be rolled out. The money promised for dental care remains uncommitted, and the oral health needs of so many Ontarians continue to go unmet.

P3 hospitals will continue to be built, in spite of delivering less for more money and wasting taxpayers' money.

For a few priorities that New Democrats had for health care in this budget, we see that the McGuinty government has let our province down. For a province that is hurting, with families facing unemployment and stress mounting every day, the failure to address the more pressing health care needs of Ontario is a mistake that will have great repercussions on the well-being of everybody in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I enjoyed the member's presentation. At one point in her presentation, she asked rhetorically about the political will of the government to take this kind of a bold measure. Let me just expand on a couple of measures in the budget that do indicate the political will that the member asked about.

Minimum wage was up every year that our government has been in office. It had been frozen at \$6.85 for eight years between 1995 and 2003, but it's been up every single year since 2004. It now stands at \$9.50 an hour, and if I understand the member's comment, she is saying that she's going to vote against that.

The member talked about long-term-care homes, and I think it's worth mentioning some of the issues in the budget that are important to seniors. The seniors' property tax grant is going to double to \$500 a year starting next year, 2010. This helps people stay in the same homes that they raised their families in. It will benefit more than 600,000 seniors with about a billion dollars in assistance, but if I understand the member correctly, she has indicated that she's going to vote against that.

There is more than \$360 million in the budget that the member from Nickel Belt, if I understand her correctly, says that she won't support, that will help create new affordable housing for low-income seniors and persons with disabilities; some \$175 million over the next two years to extend the Canada-Ontario affordable housing program to create new homes for low-income families, senior citizens, persons with mental disabilities and victims of domestic violence.

The member asked about the political will, and I think that the budget very clearly shows that it's there.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member for Nepean-Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's always nice to see a fellow woman in the

chair, so congratulations. I know that you are very excited to be there today, and you're doing a brilliant job. I know all my colleagues agree.

I appreciate the opportunity to do a two-minute hit today on the budget, and I always appreciate my colleague from Nickel Belt's assessment of the circumstances both in her portfolio of health and also on how the budget will impact her community. We in this chamber can always count on an honest assessment from her of where she believes the Liberals' policy impacts her. We don't always agree, but I will be very honest: I always appreciate how forthright she is in bringing those concerns to this chamber.

We ought to be concerned, and I look forward to speaking about this at length this afternoon. We ought to be concerned with this budget. It was a bad-news budget for Ontario. Mr. McGuinty and his government earned the triple crown of high taxes, high deficit and high debt. This is very sad when are you looking at an economy the size of Ontario's, and also its importance. I don't have to tell you how disappointing it has become in recent years to see Ontario as the economic engine of this great nation go from first to worst.

It was just five days ago when this province, for the first time since Confederation, started accepting equalization payments from the federal government.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I think that is probably, as my colleague from Trinity-Spadina points out, hurtful. It's also shameful. This budget has done nothing to restore the confidence in Ontario's consumers, small business community, medium business community or even our corporate community that we will once again be the economic engine and pride and joy of this great nation.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the opportunity to speak to this piece of legislation.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Trinity-Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to congratulate my colleague and friend from Nickel Belt on being very assiduous in her efforts to identify gaps and deficiencies in the health care system as it relates to nurses or home care or nursing homes, and other issues that she raised, and talking about the need to repair the system and provide the services that are so desperately needed.

What does the government do? It gives \$4.5 billion over a three-year period to corporations by way of tax cuts they don't need. These are profitable organizations that don't need my money, yet McGuinty is happily giving away \$4.5 billion or more over a three-year period and we're starving for cash to repair our health care system—and they're proud of that. Then they give a tax cut to any individual earning under \$36,000—a percentage cut from 6% to 5%. That gives me a tax cut. It gives us all, those of us who are earning over \$100,000, a tax cut. Do you or I or anyone earning anything over \$100,000 need a tax cut? Money is desperately needed to repair our health care system and make it whole and sane,

and you give me a tax cut I don't need. I just don't understand it.

To boot, they harmonize the PST and the GST, meaning that on everything you honest citizens and taxpayers pay at the counter, you're going to get whacked with a 13% tax in perpetuity. Not only are you going to get whacked in sales tax, but the corporations are going to get \$4.5 billion in tax cuts and I'm getting an income tax cut I don't need when we could use the money for our health care system. Merci beaucoup.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Brant.

Mr. Dave Levac: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I want to jump in on the congratulatory theme that has been offered to you. Best wishes in the chair for the remainder of the House sittings.

Let me first talk to the member from Nickel Belt on her one-hour leadoff, and quickly say thank you for the comments she made in a fair and balanced way, which I know she always does.

Let me then continue with some of the effects that would happen on a local level. I did have an opportunity to speak to some business leaders and some individuals and some of the affected and disfranchised people. In terms of the budget allocation, there were some concerns raised; of course there were. Anyone who would stand up in this House on any budget at any given time would not be standing up and saying there are some concerns being laid on the table about how this bill would affect their local community. Let me tell you some of the feedback I got.

There were some concerns raised about some of the misinformation that seemed to be out there regarding harmonization as a stand-alone issue. We can stand up and start playing the game back and forth, and I don't want to do that. Here's what's happening: In terms of what we are talking about, many members on that side, in Her Majesty's loyal opposition, are on record as supporting harmonization at one time or another. Now they're saying it doesn't happen: "We don't want it now; we're not for it now."

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Say it, say it.

Mr. Dave Levac: Well, I should, but I'm not going to. I said Her Majesty's loyal opposition.

I want to suggest to you that there are the goods that are penalized out, and once we have a moment to speak to my constituents about the other benefits lying inside that budget, they begin to take a sober second thought about whether or not we're setting the table for the future. My reality is that this is an opportunity for us to set the future heading for all businesses—and the loyal opposition keeps claiming they're for business. When business says they like it, and now they don't, I think there are some misgivings—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you. The member from Nickel Belt has two minutes to respond.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. First I'd like to answer my colleague from Mississauga—

Streetsville. Basically, I talked about long-term care, and he brings back things like minimum wage and talks about the credit for elderly people in their houses, etc., and says, "She's going to be voting against all this." I didn't talk about minimum wage, and we're on record as saying we want the \$10.25 an hour right now. We're also on record saying—

Interjection.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I was talking about long-term care and minimum standards of care that are not in, that had been promised, and those promises were broken. I don't want this to be all lumped up together and pretend that I said something that I didn't say. I never said anything about the credit for elderly people and I never said anything about the minimum wage either, although I support having \$10.25 an hour right now for a minimum-wage earner.

I want to thank my colleague from Nepean—Carleton. Certainly, she sums it up: high tax, high deficit, high debt. I'll leave it there.

My colleague from Trinity—Spadina: The tax cuts to profitable corporations to the tune of \$4.5 billion, that's a lot of money. We could have fixed our home care system with that money. We could have put into place the second stage of medicare and started to keep people healthy. Certainly we could have done a whole lot of things that would have helped all of the parts of the health care system that I've talked about, from long-term care to home care to hospitals. But none of this happened. We gave a tax cut—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on the budget motion, and congratulations on assuming the seat of the Speaker. I'm sure you will do a great job in the years to come.

I want to take my time talking about an issue which is extremely important to my riding of Ottawa Centre, and that is the issue around the need for affordable housing. It's an issue we have often discussed in this House. It's an issue which I hear about constantly in my riding. I just want to take the time to share with this House as to the feedback I have received in my riding and the kind of things we need to do and the kind of actions which are being taken in this particular budget.

I think some of the members know that before I was elected in October 2007 I was quite involved in the community. I sat on the board of the Centretown Community Health Centre, a great organization in the riding of Ottawa Centre which works with vulnerable people and provides health care, both primary health care and other social and health care services, to those individuals who live in the Centretown area. One of the issues, of course, that in that capacity I had to deal with, is the need for affordable housing, the need for upgrades of existing affordable housing and the need for new affordable housing in order to undermine the existing waiting list.

Once elected, I undertook to focus on that particular issue because it impacts so many lives. It impacts the

lives of individuals who are already living on quite low incomes. It affects the lives of single mothers and their young kids. It affects the lives of new Canadians who are making their new home in the great city of Ottawa. We have to make sure we do everything in our capacity to ensure that they are living in a safe environment, in a healthy environment, in a community that fosters a positive atmosphere so they can continue on with their life and build on it.

Over the past year and a half since I've been elected, I've undertaken many consultations on this particular issue, the issue dealing with affordable housing. I had the opportunity to hold three consultations on property reduction, which I know, Madam Speaker, you have a keen interest in. Among many issues that are discussed, the need for appropriate affordable housing is an issue which comes up again and again.

I also had the opportunity to hold a pre-budget consultation in the month of January with members of the community to get their feedback, get their opinion as to where the government should be investing. There were a couple of interesting points that came out, the highlights of which I wanted to take a moment to illustrate.

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One was the need for having a stimulus package. There was almost a consensus among the group that we needed to invest in our economy, especially in these tough economic times. The point was made that we need to invest in a "smart stimulus." I asked the question: "What do you all mean by 'smart stimulus'?" The advice I got was that, "'Smart stimulus' means that we invest in infrastructure projects that will pay dividends in the long term."

So when I raised the example such as affordable housing, everybody agreed that that's exactly the kind of smart stimulus they're talking about, where we invest our hard-earned taxpayer dollars in order to reignite this slackening economy through projects like affordable housing, which will not only create jobs here today but also will ensure that we are helping to better the lives of others in the long term. That really struck me because I thought that was a very important point.

The other feedback I received in that pre-budget consultation was that it's okay to have a deficit. It was yet again a consensus opinion of that group of people that, due to the tough economic times we are in, it is okay for the government to incur a deficit to make sure that we, as an economy, grow.

So with that context, what I undertook was to inform, on behalf of my constituents in Ottawa Centre, the Minister of Finance as to the kinds of things we need to undertake. One of them was urging the Minister of Finance to invest in affordable housing in this budget. I'll be very frank that I was quite concerned that in these tough economic times there may be this argument that, "This is not the time to invest in something like affordable housing." A few times, I made the argument to the minister that it is extremely important. I was quite heartened to learn that the government will be making a

significant investment in affordable housing in this budget. That was news which I very much cherish, and it's news which I can assure you that the social housing providers in my community in Ottawa Centre and the greater city of Ottawa have very much relished. They have been incredibly thankful for the investment the government is undertaking to make.

I want to mention a few people who I consult on a regular basis and have an opportunity to work with, who are doing some incredible, phenomenal work in the community: Jo-Anne Poirier, for example, who is the president of Ottawa Community Housing; Catherine Boucher, who is the executive director of the Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corp., another not-for-profit housing corporation, and I'll speak about one of their very important projects in a minute; Dr. Tareen, who is involved with the Multifaith Housing Initiative; Karen Sexsmith, who's the executive director of Co-operative Housing Association of Eastern Ontario, CHASEO, another great organization; and then there is a broader network of social housing providers in Ottawa called OSHN, the Ottawa Social Housing Network. All of them are collectively working together to ensure that we have affordable housing available in the city of Ottawa.

I have approached and spoken to all these organizations about the budget. In this budget, the government is investing \$1.2 billion, half coming from the federal government through their budget, which was great news to hear that the federal government is willing to invest in affordable and social housing, and the other half coming from the provincial government to ensure that we renew the existing social housing infrastructure, which in some instances is in a shambles, but also to build new affordable housing for both low-income Ontarians and for senior Ontarians.

I continued to go door-to-door as the MPP for Ottawa Centre. During this whole winter, I made sure that I visited a majority of the affordable housing buildings, mostly by Ottawa Community Housing, and to go door to door in those units to hear from the people to be able to see first-hand what shape or form these buildings are in.

Of course, there is a lot of work to do be done. None of these buildings are in a perfect state. But I'm happy to report that I have noted that work is constantly going on, there are improvements going on, and they are indicative of the investments which have been made.

In 2007, the government announced \$100 million for repair of affordable housing. Ottawa received \$8 million out of the \$100 million, based on the formula used, of which roughly \$4 million was given to Ottawa Community Housing, and the other \$4 million was given to other not-for-profit social housing providers.

Just a few weeks ago, Minister Meilleur, Minister Watson, MPP McNeely, MPP Lalonde and I had the opportunity to visit 20 Rochester, a not-for-profit housing corporation, sort of townhouses, in my riding of Ottawa Centre, where, due to the \$8 million which was given to the city of Ottawa, a lot of renovations are going on—and not just renovations, actually. Ottawa Community Hous-

ing is doing a great thing: They are actually retrofitting these units to be energy-efficient, which is an excellent way of using these dollars. Not only do you renew these properties, but you also make them energy-efficient, so the long-term cost savings are significant. It was incredible to see the kinds of positive changes which these renovations were making in the neighbourhood.

I'm very proud to stand here and report on that type of investment just taking shape, which was announced towards the end of 2007. Last year, in 2008, as part of the Investing in Ontario funding which was made, the city of Ottawa received \$77 million. Along with the city councillors in my riding, I worked very hard to make sure that a significant portion of that money is being invested towards affordable housing. I'm very happy to report, and I thank the Ottawa city council for taking that step, that \$13 million from that \$77 million is being invested in the repair of affordable and social housing: \$9 million is being allocated to Ottawa Community Housing, because they do have the largest amount of stock within the city of Ottawa; and another \$4 million is being allocated to other not-for-profit-housing.

All these investments are making a tremendous impact on the community. Like I said, when I do go door to door in Ottawa Community Housing buildings and other CCOC buildings, I can see the changes coming about, and I am starting to hear from the people that all the elevators are working, as opposed to just one or two; that units are being refurbished; and that it is having a positive impact on their health and their children's health.

But of course, unfortunately, there lingers the problem of a growing waiting list. In Ottawa we have a significant waiting list which we need to continue to address. That's why I was very happy to see that in this budget there is—where are my numbers?—about \$360 million over the next two years to create or build 4,500 new affordable housing units for low-income seniors and persons with disabilities—a significant investment.

Of course, we can use more; no doubt about it. But in these tough economic times, it is a great example of smart stimulus to ensure that we build new affordable housing units for those who very much need the assistance.

More money is also being invested in the Canada-Ontario affordable housing program—about \$175 million—which will be creating new homes for low-income families, seniors, persons living with mental illness, and victims of domestic violence.

I also want to talk about the affordable housing program funding allocated before 2007 in the city of Ottawa in the amount of \$44.8 million for 973 new units. I am happy to report that as of February 27, 2009, 17 projects with 768 units for \$42.81 million in affordable housing program funding have been approved; and 410 units are occupied and 358 units are in the planning approval stage under that program. These are new units, in addition to 4,500 units that will come through this budget, which is going to result in more affordable housing for those who are on the waiting list.

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Just in my riding, work has begun on a site called Beaver Barracks. It's on Argyle Avenue, next to the Metro Y project which has been undertaken by CCOC—the Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corp. These units are being built for people with low incomes and people with disabilities in terms of ensuring that there is accessibility in this particular project.

I am very happy to also report that CCOC is doing such good work that these units are going to be almost LEED gold standard, in that rank, in terms of the steps they're taking to ensure that the life of these units is long in terms of sustainability and cost savings. These brand new units, which hopefully should be all built by the middle of next year, will again result in helping seniors of low income, individuals of low income and persons with disabilities to make sure that they have affordable housing to live in.

All these things combined show a positive direction, a positive force in terms of things this government has been doing to alleviate the problem around affordable housing, an issue which I think we all collectively agree that we need to continue to invest in. Although we need to do more, we are moving in the right direction. As I mentioned earlier, I was quite concerned that, given that the economy is not doing well, the government may step back from the issue of affordable housing. But this budget is proof positive that that is not the case and that we are actually making a very enhanced, substantial investment in affordable housing.

Towards the end of my comments, I wanted to also talk about other steps that the government is taking in terms of reducing poverty. I mentioned earlier that I had the opportunity of doing three poverty reduction consultations in my community. Two of them were attended by Minister Matthews, who came down to Ottawa to hear directly from social service providers and from members of the community as to the kinds of things the government needs to do. And the government, through its poverty reduction strategy, has taken a very active, stepped-up role in reducing poverty for our children and their families. The aim or the target is 25% reduction in five years. That's why, once again, I was very heartened to see that in this budget, the government has decided to almost double the Ontario child benefit supplement for families with low income. So, right now, families are getting about \$600 per child annually, and once the budget is passed—if the budget is passed—that supplement will increase to \$1,100 per child annually.

Once again, when I'm out there in my community, I'm hearing from single mothers, from those who very much rely on that kind of support. I'm receiving a lot of thank yous, which is great to hear in public life when people tell you, "Thank you very much for looking after our plight. Thank you very much for considering us. Every little bit helps."

The fact that the economy is down does not mean that it only impacts those who have the means to sustain themselves. The fact that the economy is down impacts

poor people as much as anybody else. The fact that this government is investing in the needs of people who are vulnerable, people who are disabled, people who are poorer, demonstrates that the economic argument, not only from a moral persuasion point of view that it is the right thing to do, but also from the economic point of view the government realizes that that is smart economics; that investing in our vulnerable communities is ensuring that our economy grows, that it is the right thing to do.

I'm very glad that these steps are being taken in this budget, which will result in creating a more compassionate and caring Ontario. It will ensure that those who need the help, for whatever circumstances, across this province or in my riding of Ottawa Centre, have that help very much available.

At this point my time has almost run out. Again, I'm very much thankful for the investment that is being made, in the affordable housing sector through investment of \$1.2 billion and also through the increasing supplements of the Ontario child benefit. I think we will all agree, no matter which side of the aisle we sit on, that these are the right kinds of investments and that these are the people, even in tough economic times—in fact, even more because of tough economic times—who we need to invest in to make sure they have the resources necessary to live a healthy and vibrant life as equal Ontarians in this province.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for your indulgence, and I look forward to hearing views from other members.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I appreciate making comments to the speech by the member from Ottawa Centre. Obviously, as a member of the government, he's trying to sell the government message, whatever it would be. I'm not so sure if they've been at a lot of events and heard what the general public is saying about this budget. I've seen, probably, over the course of this last weekend, 500 or 600 people at different kinds of events, and I've never had one person come up and tell me they really like that budget, particularly real estate agents—real estate agents love the budget, you know? They absolutely detest this government right now, because they can't believe that after all the lobbying they did against the harmonization, the government actually put it through.

But I think what really got my attention, more than anything, were the comments this morning from the question from my colleague Ms. MacLeod, when she talked about the funeral services. I think that tops it all off. People have been used to paying a 5% fee on all funeral services, and now this government has found a way to get 13% in taxes out of someone who's lost a loved one, whether it's the coffin or the services by the undertaker. I find that a little bit detestable, in hard economic times particularly. There are some people who have had to save a lot of money to try to put money aside for a future funeral, and you know, a lot of people

preplan. It'll be very interesting to see how this government deals with those people who have already paid in advance for preplanned funerals.

We on this side of the House, the members of the PC Party, absolutely will not support this budget. We think it's probably the worst budget they've ever come out with. It's not a good budget for the future. It's not a good budget for our children. As I said earlier, we won't be supporting it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to make a few comments to the member from Ottawa Centre, who certainly was trying to sell his government's budget. I mean, he talked about social housing, which is something that we have been advocating for for a long time. There is a little bit of social housing in it, to the tune of 4,500 units, I think, and a large part of those units could all be used in my riding alone. The waiting list for social housing in Sudbury and Nickel Belt is huge, and certainly there will be very few coming our way once it's split province-wide.

As he says he has been attending events, so have I been around my riding. A lot of people in my riding work either in the mining industry or the forestry industry. Forestry was left completely out of this budget. There is nothing targeted to help start the forestry industry, and when we talk about the people from my riding who work in the mining industry, the same thing applies. There are lots of people in northern Ontario who have lost their jobs who used to work in the forestry industry. They have put forward, and certainly our party has put forward, solutions that would help the forestry industry to regain some momentum and work against the massive layoffs that have happened in that industry. But none of those ideas we can find in the budget. Same thing with the mining industry, where in the last couple of months we've seen over a thousand people from my riding lose their jobs. Those are good jobs with good benefits. Nothing in the budget will help those people.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Hamilton Mountain.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I have to tell you you look great in that chair. Congratulations.

I'm glad to stand this afternoon and comment on my colleague's great debate about the budget motion specifically. He spoke a lot about investment in social housing. If the budget is passed, that's going to mean a lot of money to Hamilton, to my riding, as well as his riding. It's unfortunate that the honourable member of the third party got up and said that's not enough: \$1.2 billion. I'd say that's a lot. It's not enough—there's more to do—but it sure is a step in the right direction.

On March 27, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services and I held a post-budget meeting. I will tell you that at that meeting we had many positive comments, specifically about the infrastructure money,

the \$32.5 billion that will be coming to this province. That shows a great commitment to the new jobs that it's going to create for all of our cities.

What I also want to talk about is that, as the member did say, 93% of all Ontarians will be receiving a tax cut.

Again, this is a good budget for Ontario. It's the right budget for the right time.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Sarnia-Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and congratulations on assuming the chair. I know you'll do a great job.

I'd like to comment on the remarks from the member from Ottawa Centre. I too listened with interest as he tried to sell, defend, the budget being proposed, Bill 141.

Just a few statistics to read into the record: The budget predicts a decline in GDP of 2.5% in the coming year, in corporate profits. This is going to lead to an increase in unemployment, with estimates of 135,000 more job losses. The total spending projected for 2009-10 is up 58% since 2003. The debt in Ontario now stands at over \$200 billion, almost double the \$111 billion it was when the government first took office.

A number of other items are also going to be taxed. It's all well and good to talk about the impressive—

Interjection: List them.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Should I list them? Okay, I can do that; I've got 57 seconds.

Just some of the items that are going to be increased: Prepared food sold for \$4 or less, postal stamps, home heating oil, Internet access fees, home renovations, manicures, dry cleaning, veterinary fees. Even when you take your dog—I was going to say take your dog to the cleaner's—to the vet, you're going to have to pay more. Your golf green fees, for those that are so engaged—I don't golf myself; no good. Anyway, there are health foods, accountant services, tobacco. It would be fine with me if they put the taxes up more—I don't smoke anymore; Haircuts and styling, air conditioning, etc.

The point I'm trying to make is that there are a number of people who are going to be hit with this budget's increased costs at a time in a recession when they can least afford it.

I look forward to the rest of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Ottawa Centre has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to extend my gratitude to the members from Simcoe North, Nickel Belt, Hamilton Mountain and Sarnia-Lambton for their comments.

I'm a bit distraught that none of them—I think the member from Hamilton Mountain, a bit—talked about what I talked about for 20 minutes: that is, the investment in affordable housing. I wasn't trying to sell a budget or anything. I spent 20 minutes actually talking about the needs of my community and how this budget will address those needs.

I don't think it comes as a surprise to me that the official opposition will not be supporting our budget, but

I think, by that token, what they are saying is that they don't agree with a \$1.2-billion investment in affordable housing, an investment which is very much needed.

I think that three times in my comments I said yes, that more needs to be done. I don't think anybody can stand here and say "This is it; we've resolved the problem." But I think that acknowledging that there is an issue and then putting substantive funding, substantive dollars to address that issue, is a positive step in the right direction, and I think we should acknowledge that. One point two billion dollars will result in 50,000 units being renovated across this province, which will result in 4,500 new units for low-income seniors, for persons with disabilities. Yes, that won't alone resolve this issue in Sudbury, but that doesn't mean that we don't do anything. The resources are always limited and we have to do our best within the resources available. I'm very proud that in this budget, one of the priorities of the government is to resolve or work towards the issue of affordable housing. The government could have easily taken a backseat and said, "We've already invested over \$100 million last year through interim money and we don't need to do any more," but no. This budget contains a smart stimulus, a stimulus which definitely my community in Ottawa Centre will benefit from.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: Madam Speaker, congratulations on your new position.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the budget motion this afternoon. Starting out, I would certainly characterize this budget as being a typical Liberal big tax-and-spend budget. I don't think there's any denying that; you just need to look back at recent history in 2003 when the McGuinty government first came into power. The budget, in rough numbers, was about \$68 billion in 2003. What we've seen since that time is really a ramping up of spending and increasing of the civil service in great numbers. So I would say that we're now in a situation where, really, spending is out of control in the government. That's the thing that the government is having the greatest difficulty in controlling.

We've had some pretty good years in the last five and a half years—boom times, really. It's a time when, if we were, as a government, as a province, being smart, we would have been getting the economy as efficient as possible and we would have been putting some money aside for the rainy day that is now hitting us big-time. Unfortunately, that's not what happened. The government, over the past five and a half years, has had far more money than they planned on having. Every budget they made, they'd end up getting more money, and they'd always spend every dime they ever got. That has happened successfully every year, so that now, the plan for the 2009-10 budget is \$109 billion. That is, on an annual basis, \$41 billion a year more than the 2003 budget.

We've seen the story before, because it was back in the Peterson years, 1986 to 1990—again, the same thing

happened. We had a boom economy, and what happened? In the time right before that, my father happened to be the Premier and Treasurer leading up to that point, and government spending was being controlled through attrition in the civil service. In fact, over a number of years, the civil service was reduced by about 5,000 members and it was done in a way that didn't affect services, and through attrition, mainly. When the Peterson government came into power, within six months of being in power it had hired all those people back and more and, in those boom years, put the province of Ontario into a precarious situation which the NDP inherited. We ended up with record deficits.

We're heading back into that territory again, where, as I say, the spending has increased dramatically. If we look at this year we just finished, the 2008-09 budget year—the budget year for the province of Ontario goes from April 1 to March 31. We just finished a financial year. Back a year ago, the government forecast a surplus for this year. Then we had the fall economic statement come out and the government was forecasting things—all of a sudden, things were unwinding pretty quickly. The government then changed to a \$500-million deficit. In the few short months until we got to the end of the financial year, we actually had a \$4-billion deficit.

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But the surprising thing, over that time frame—I think everybody was caught by surprise in the fall with the huge and rapid change of the world economic situation, but you would have thought, with this happening, the government might have tried to control spending, but they still spent more than they forecast at the beginning of the year, despite everything unwinding in the world economy.

This government's biggest challenge is that they absolutely cannot control spending. With many of the contracts they've given out to the big groups—most of them are over 12% increases over the next three or four years—they've committed to huge increases in spending with so many groups out there.

So certainly their spending being out of control is a huge concern. We just need to look at their plan for the next few years to do with the deficit and debt. I can say that I characterize it as being scary, because I think it is. No matter what you like about all the various aspects of the budget, their plan for the deficit and debt is scary. As I mentioned, for the year that just ended, which is the 2008-09 year, we had a \$4-billion deficit, despite their forecasting a surplus just a few months ago.

For next year, we're going to set an all-time record and outdo Bob Rae's deficit. If the plan goes through, they're planning on a \$14-billion deficit for 2009-10. Go to 2010-11, and they're planning on a \$12.2-billion deficit. If you go to 2011-12, they're planning on a \$9.7-billion deficit. Go to 2012-13, and they're planning an \$8-billion deficit. If you go to 2013-14, they're planning on a \$5.8-billion deficit. If you go to 2014-15, they're planning on a \$3.1-billion deficit. So, then, in 2015-16, if it all works out, they're back to a balanced budget. Over

that time period, that's an extra \$57 billion in additional debt on top of the debt that we already have, so the government, since 2003, will have more than doubled the debt of the province in a very short time.

But I think the part that's scariest, based on the past track record of this government and past Liberal governments, is that to reach this plan which I've just outlined, they need to restrain spending to a point that they never have in the past. I'll read directly from the budget where it states, on page 89 in the plan to eliminate the deficit, "For this reason, during this same period, program expense growth will be held to an average annual growth rate of 2.3% in order to achieve balance while protecting core public services."

Well, that sounds just wonderful, except the track record of this government is 8% annual increases in spending, so for them to reach 2.3% will mean—well, I just don't believe that they're actually going to do it. That means that even though this plan of a balanced budget by 2015-16 is an awfully long way out there, I don't think it's realistic, especially when you look at the past track record of this government.

Of course, when you have these huge deficits and debt, the other thing you have as a result of that is higher interest charges. That's another real concern that goes hand in hand with this. If you look at the interest from the budget papers on page 90 of the budget—look at the interest that we're going to be paying on this deficit and debt—you'll see that it was less than \$9 billion last year, going up to the planned \$9.3 billion in interest this year, up to \$9.9 billion in 2010-11, \$11.1 billion in 2011-12, \$11.6 billion in 2012-13, \$12 billion in 2013-14, \$12.2 billion in 2014-15—up to \$12.2 billion. They're basically planning on an additional \$3 billion in interest payments to service the debt in the next few short years. That's \$3 billion that can't be used for roads, can't be used for hospitals, can't be used for nurses, health care, whatever, because it's going to be used to service the debt on this plan. I certainly have real problems with that.

Now, there are some parts of the budget which I think are positive, although for some reason the positive aspects are being delayed. For example, they're planning on eventually reducing the corporate income tax from the current rate, which is 14%, down to 10%. The problem I have with that is that first of all, if the PC government had remained in power, our current corporate income tax rate would be 8%, based on the schedule we were on, and we would be much more competitive with the other Canadian provinces and with the United States.

Secondly, their planned modest reduction is not going to take effect in this budget year, so I'm not quite sure why it is even in this budget, because it will come into effect after next year's budget. They could have just announced it next year. They go from 14% to 12% on July 1, 2010.

The same holds true for another positive aspect I recall, which is a reduction in the small business tax. That doesn't happen until next year's budget—July 1, 2010, so they go from 5.5% to 4.5%, a reduction in the tax rates for small businesses as well.

Those are positive things. We'd like to see them. We're in a crisis right now. We'd like to see action a little bit quicker on that front.

We, as the opposition, did put forward what we thought were some positive proposals for the budget. Unfortunately, the government didn't see fit to pick up really any of those proposals. We had made the suggestion of a retail sales tax holiday for the purchase of new cars to try to stimulate auto sales in this province. Certainly, the North American car companies are struggling. They have basically one customer, and that customer is the car dealers. If the car dealers aren't ordering cars, obviously there's no need to produce cars. Based on that logic and based on some past experience in this province—actually back in 1980, when my father was Treasurer and also in 1981, three times in total, my father, as Treasurer, brought in a sales tax holiday. In all cases, the result was very positive and very beneficial to the auto sector. Of course, that's a huge part of the economy here in Ontario. We had recommended that the government bring in a three-month sales tax holiday to get the dealers ordering cars and to help stimulate the manufacture of cars. That ends up working its way through so you get a requirement for more steel coming out of Hamilton etc. Unfortunately, the government didn't take us up on that.

We also had a proposal to follow the lead of countries like Germany, where they have a retire-your-ride program. I think in Germany they give you around 2,500 euros, which is roughly about \$5,000, if you trade in your car that's more than 10 years old. We in the opposition had a similar but more modest proposal recommending that the government do a couple of things to help stimulate auto sales, once again, and also to get the old cars, more than 10 years old, which are by far bigger polluters, off the road. We thought that was a reasonable suggestion, and we would have liked to have seen the government act on that suggestion. Unfortunately, they didn't pick up on that suggestion either.

We also had a suggestion to bring in a program through the credit unions to free up credit, because if you're dealing with and talking to any small companies at all, you know that getting access to credit right now is very difficult. It's a key part of growing the economy, so we had a proposal to bring in a program like they have through the banks backed up by the federal government, where the credit unions loaning out money to small companies would be backstopped by the province to 85%. In the federal program, basically the exposure for the government is the bad debts, and it has not cost a lot of money; it has been very successful. We thought that would be a good idea at this critical point in the economy, where companies are having a difficult time borrowing money, to bring in a similar program in Ontario. Unfortunately, the government didn't pick up on it.

But one of the big things that they certainly did pick up on and that I'm hearing a lot about is the HST, the harmonized sales tax. That has certainly stimulated hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of e-mails from

constituents in Parry Sound–Muskoka who are opposed to the harmonized sales tax. Basically that expands the provincial sales tax, the 8%, to many more products. It will be on hamburgers. It will be on haircuts. It will be on heating oil. Importantly, for a rural and northern area, it will be on gasoline that we put in our automobiles, and electricity. Heating oil, gasoline and electricity are some pretty basic things that, certainly, in rural and northern Ontario, you don't really have a lot of choice about. It's rare that you don't rely on an automobile in rural and northern Ontario, and that's a pretty big hit for people who live in rural areas, an 8% increase in the cost. As well, with heating oil and electricity, the further north you get, the colder it is and the bigger your bills are. That's a pretty challenging extra cost, particularly in this time when the economy is pretty slow. So I'm certainly questioning—I'm hearing from lots of constituents about this issue.

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In fact, I'd like to get on the record a couple of different concerns I've heard. Maybe I will start with somebody who is in the building business. Kaye Brothers from Milford Bay wrote to me:

"We are very much opposed to this change and hope that you will not support the proposal. Every contractor that I have spoken to is also opposed to a harmonized sales tax.

"Presently, when residential contractors (carpenters, plumbers, electricians, landscapers, painters, stonemasons and others) work for clients, there is no PST calculated or charged. If the harmonized tax is put into effect, then there will be a tax of 8% added to all the labour that is charged to every job."

They go on and on—I'm not going to have time to get all these various letters on—and this part is good:

"We believe that the underground construction industry in this area is absolutely huge. When we bid against contractors who work under the table now, we are already at a huge disadvantage because those workers are probably not charging GST (5%) nor are most paying WSIB premiums (10%), so they can undercut us by 15% and still charge the same for their labour. When the WSIB start charging owners of companies premiums on personal income, the spread will increase for us by 2% and now with PST another 8%. The incentive to work under the table will then be 5% plus 10% plus 2% plus 8%, or 25%. I have heard stories about how these changes will level the playing field, but whoever thinks this needs to have a major touch of reality. The province, in our mind, will increase the incentive for labour to work under the table, decrease the incentive for home owners to spend money on their property and therefore reduce the amount of work directed at legitimate tax-paying companies. This will reduce the amount of income tax that will be collected and then further drive up the need for more taxes."

That's from Kaye Brothers, a builder in Parry Sound. I have another one; I'm trying to get to a few different sectors who have written to me. As I say, I have hundreds

of e-mails. Here is somebody in the tourism business, Nancy Tapley from the Tapley Bondi cottage resort. First of all, she brings up the return-to-school issue, saying:

"Norm, thank you for taking up the cudgels for the early return to school, even if we weren't successful. As a follow-up comment, I can tell you that this has blown the last two weeks of the summer season wide open on my reservation board, but perhaps I can still find some retired folks whose pensions/investments haven't collapsed in the economy" So that's another issue, that it is negatively affecting tourism in Parry Sound–Muskoka.

"I am writing today, however, about the 'new and improved' harmonized tax. This will add 3% immediately in all housekeeping tourist accommodation. That will obviously have an impact on our competitiveness in a market where the cruise ships are currently offering \$35/night to try to fill their ships and other southern destinations that do not have to cope with taxes, insurance, water requirements and on and on."

She goes on to talk about how the government is talking about a district marketing fund:

"I'm actually relieved that the DMF (room tax) of 3% on accommodations is being shelved, because when it was suggested that this be made mandatory it, too, would force an increase in what we have to charge our customers, and customers are in short supply up here in the great white north, let me assure you. (It perhaps bodes well for the upcoming G8 security details, because at present you could fire a proverbial canon down main street in town and no one would be there to notice)"

She goes on to say:

"There is no reassurance that if we give them more money there will suddenly be an improvement in performance. Interestingly, my cousins were recently in Miami where they discovered that the huge pot of money raised by the DMF—that's the district marketing fund—"is now an enormous amount and the city wants to take it for upgrading hospitals and other infrastructure."

So there are concerns from tourism. I'm going quickly because I have only a couple of minutes left. I was trying to get to a few different businesses that have concerns. I have an e-mail here also from an individual:

"My wife and I are long-time residents of Muskoka. After reviewing the government's plan to harmonize the GST and PST, we feel that the plan has failed to address the economic problems that this province and the nation are currently experiencing." I would agree with that; certainly the timing is not good. "The one thing that stands out more than anything is the tax on services provided on resale houses. We understand that new housing can stimulate the economy by providing jobs, but we think you are missing the main point. The resale market is the market that most first-time buyers and seniors target, mainly because it is more affordable for them. By imposing this new 8% tax on related services on resale housing, you are unfairly penalizing the two most vulnerable groups of buyers in the country, first-time buyers and seniors. We are asking to bring this to the Premier's attention. Remember, these two groups have a

powerful voice in election year. Giving people incentives to spend their money is the way to stimulate the economy, not placing more tax on one of the necessities of life." That was from George and Sandra McEachran.

As my time winds down, I will just wrap up, because I don't have time to get through the many various e-mails, and just say that certainly one of my biggest concerns with this budget is the huge deficits that are going to be planned for the next number of years, the huge amount of debt that is being piled on to the people of Ontario and the unrealistic plan the government has to get out of debt. I believe that's going to be a tax on future generations, and I have real concerns with that. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I do appreciate the comments made by the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka. He has covered a fair amount of ground. I want to comment specifically in the area of harmonization, and I want him to speak to this because I find that many Tories and Liberals are in complete harmony with the issue of harmonization. I want him to correct me where it's possible, because I find it enigmatic here and there because I saw the quote by the member from Leeds-Grenville where he talks about how "in theory, we're supportive of harmonization." I could never separate the theory from practice—me, at least. Maybe the member from Muskoka has a better way of separating theory from practice. He might also help me with John Tory, the former leader, who was here for a while—a respectable man—and who obviously supported harmonization. I quoted his remarks from the paper in this regard.

I know that Jim Flaherty, the finance minister, is a big booster of harmonization, and he used to be here as a provincial member, big-time. Mr. Harper is another big booster of harmonization, i.e., making sure we combine the PST and GST together so people get whacked in perpetuity on all the consumption they make. Iggy, the most erudite and learned of opposition members, supports harmonization.

So you see, member from Muskoka, there's a great deal of—how shall I say it?—collusion when it comes to the issue of harmonization between Libs and Tories. You just might want to help me to clear it up, because I really like the campaign we've got against harmonization, at least as New Democrats put it, because we're pretty clear on this. I know you are opposed to it as well, but could you demystify that connection that you have with the Liberals in this regard?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Member from Richmond Hill.

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's a pleasure to rise in this House and comment on the budget. At the outset, Madam Speaker, I wish to congratulate you on your new position as the Acting Speaker.

Also, I wish to commend the Minister of Finance on preparing this very specific budget to address this unique time in our economy, a time when our economy—and the

world's economy, for that matter—is in difficulty. This budget is specifically designed to address those very points of the economy.

When you look at this budget from just one specific point, for example, harmonizing or cutting taxes, yes, you may start talking about this budget and criticizing this budget. But one should look at this budget as a package. On one side, the budget provides \$1.2 billion for social housing. This budget provides construction for 4,500 new houses. This budget provides rehabilitation of 50,000 existing social housing units. This budget provides doubling of child benefits—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Do you support harmonization?

Mr. Reza Moridi: Yes, of course I support harmonization.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Say it.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Yes, harmonization: We are going to unite both taxes.

Now, this is going to stimulate our economy; this is going to help our people; and, in the meantime, we are going to provide a \$1,000 rebate for our people.

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In the meantime, this budget is proposing a massive investment in our economy—a \$32.5-billion investment in our economy. The Premier just announced a \$9-billion investment in our economy last week, which will help transit systems in Toronto and York region, in my riding of Richmond Hill, which will benefit from part of this investment.

This budget is uniquely designed for this unique time, and one should look at it as a whole, as a package.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to have an opportunity to speak to the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka's interpretation of the bill, because I quite agree with it.

For the member from Trinity-Spadina, let me assure you of one thing: We opposed the harmonized sales tax, and I have never been on record as supporting it.

I don't mind telling Ontarians and this entire chamber one thing. I remember growing up, and for those of you in this chamber who are unfamiliar with my background, I grew up in a little province called Nova Scotia, and I will never forget when my father came home, as a small businessman, wondering how he was going to continue to make ends meet when the Liberal government of the day brought in the harmonized sales tax.

With that comes a little message, and my colleague the minister for colleges will remember this, because he was working on Parliament Hill at the time. The federal Liberals had 11 members in—every seat federally; the next election, after harmonization, they lost every single seat in Nova Scotia. In fact, that was where there was a resurgence of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada. In addition to that, the Liberals in Nova Scotia also were the government; they haven't been in power since the HST. So for all the members opposite who are

receiving the same e-mails I did—and 130 of those e-mails came the day that they announced the HST—beware, your days are numbered. The Progressive Conservative Party will be back in government as a result of this budget and of this tax grab, which, by the way, will increase funeral services costs by 8%. The 13% death tax—that's what we're going to be confronted with in this chamber and this province.

This is a terrible budget for Ontario, and one person who has the most authority in this place to talk about it is Frank Miller's son, and he did a great job today in his 20-minute deputation. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I guess the question I have for the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka is, is there a country that he knows of that is not into deficit financing? Is there a country that he knows of that is not faced with this gravest economic downturn in 70 years? Is there a country in the world that is not involved in trying to inject money into the economy to ensure that people aren't out on the streets, that you don't fire nurses, you don't fire teachers, you don't fire police officers, that you pay their salaries?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Even Harper has changed. Come on.

Mr. Mike Colle: I remember, yes, the great Prime Minister of this country, before the election, said, "There will never be a deficit," but even Prime Minister Harper is a pragmatist, and he knows that countries like Iceland are bankrupt; he knows Ireland is bankrupt; he knows England is in a huge economic downturn; he knows that Czechoslovakia, despite IMF help, is in deep trouble; he knows that Hungary, despite IMF billions, is in deep trouble. Is there a country that he knows of that is immune from this economic climate change? Name that country that is not into deficit financing—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That sounds like a game, Mike.

Mr. Mike Colle: Well, it is. Name that country, because I don't think the Conservatives in Ontario are even alerted to the problem that the Conservatives in Ottawa understand. The world has changed dramatically. It's not the world of Mike Harris, of 1995, anymore. This is the world that has new leadership to face the new problems.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka has two minutes in which to respond.

Mr. Norm Miller: I thank the members for adding comments to my speech. Members from Trinity–Spadina, Richmond Hill, Nepean–Carleton and Eglinton–Lawrence, I appreciate your comments.

To the comments by the member from Eglinton–Lawrence with regard to deficits, which I spoke at reasonable length about, I would simply say that we don't need to be in as bad a situation as we are right now and we don't need to prolong it and make it quite as bad as is forecast. My worry is that it's going to be worse

than the plan, because as I pointed out, over the six or seven years you're planning on having deficits—an extra \$57 billion in deficits—your plan to get out of a deficit situation relies on this government doing something it has never done before, which is control spending. I argue that controlling spending is the biggest challenge of this government, particularly when you look at the sort of wage settlements they are doing with a number of significant groups out there. I see that as something that's a real threat to our future economic viability in the province. We're racking up \$57 billion in debt.

It will be interesting to see, when this is all over, whether we can spend ourselves out of recession. I think we've proven once before in the Ontario scenario that it didn't work, back in Bob Rae's day. I question whether it's going to work this time around. It seems all governments have decided to try that, so we'll see what happens. I would simply say that this government could manage their dollars much more effectively, and we don't need to be incurring the sort of debt for our kids that we are taking on, and they could do a much better job in that regard.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased today to say that I'll be splitting my time with the member for Ottawa–Vanier.

I've been following the debate very closely. Before I speak in some detail about the budget, I'd like to speak about the continuity of some of the budgets we've presented in this House in the past and some of the differences they've made. Six years ago, our schools—to use one example, our schools in western Mississauga—were all surrounded by many portable classrooms. Our Tory colleagues have just finished saying that Ontario's spending is out of control. I don't feel that way about our province, and I don't feel that way about our people and our future. Let me go back to the schools example. After a whole decade of financial starvation, our educators would disagree that Ontario's spending is out of control.

Our school boards no longer live in dread of a large snowfall causing, for example, a roof on a classroom to collapse. That's because the schools are properly maintained now, and the reason the schools are properly maintained is because the province of Ontario has spent money bringing them all up to standard. In my own area, in western Mississauga, we put some \$15 million into our Catholic schools to bring old schools up to the current standard, and we put some \$56 million into the public school system to bring some of those older schools up to standard. Now they're places kids can go to and know those facilities are the best we can deliver. That's not spending that's out of control.

Our educators now have sustainable, responsible, workable collective agreements, and we have properly maintained schools. We don't have that many portables in western Mississauga, because we've actually built new schools. In the area I represented before riding redistribution, by the year 2007 in the neighbourhoods of Churchill Meadows, central Erin Mills, Lisgar, Streets-

ville and Meadowvale, we built six brand new public and secondary schools—six new schools—and that's where all the portables went. We actually have new schools. I don't think that indicates spending is out of control. Because we've invested the money in the bricks and mortar to teach the children who are, indeed, our future, that doesn't indicate that spending is out of control. But to the members in the opposition, investing in our future means that spending is out of control. Respectfully, I disagree.

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The same is true in health care. In all that fast-growing 905 area I'm pleased to call home, we desperately needed expansion of our hospitals. We needed it for years, and it never happened between 1995 and 2003. The previous PC government didn't do anything about it; they just talked about it.

I ask: Is the money more valuable in the pockets of bondholders or in the facilities that look after our sick people? I think our community knows the answer. In my home community, Mississauga—Streetsville, the hospital that serves the neighbourhoods of Clarkson, Erin Mills, Churchill Meadows, Meadowvale, Streetsville, Lisgar and Cooksville has a quarter-billion dollar expansion under way. It's just one of more than 100 hospital projects. The Trillium hospital, which serves most of east and central Mississauga, has a brand spanking new capital program. It's finished; they're going to turn on the lights. It's going to expand and be able to serve the Trillium hospital community and the community surrounding it.

That's the intelligent use of money. That's the difference that a progressive budget makes. And building expansions to your hospitals doesn't mean that spending is out of control. Our opponents would look at that and say, "Well, let the private sector look after it," and indeed their party's program is to cut \$3.5 billion out of health care. I would say that that's out of control. You could say the same thing about our roads. You could say the same thing about our water distribution systems, our railways and our city infrastructure.

I ask: Does Her Majesty's opposition suggest to this Legislature, to the people they represent and to the province of Ontario, that building the competitive advantage that our province needs as we emerge from this recession to compete in a global economy indicates that spending is out of control? On this side of the House, Her Majesty's government says, "No, we do not think that spending is out of control." We think the province is investing wisely in the things it is going to need when we go head-to-head against every other economy in the world.

When people come to Ontario, they want to look here and say, "Is electricity affordable and available? Is your grid in good shape? How about your hospitals and schools? If people get sick here, can they go and get treatment? Is your infrastructure up to date? Are your roads well maintained? Can you transport people between where they live, where they work, where they study and where they go to be entertained?" We can in

tomorrow's Ontario, because our government has taken money we had yesterday, invested it while the sun was shining and built the kind of Ontario we need now and that we're going to need in years to come.

The centerpiece of the budget in 2009-10 is a comprehensive series of tax reforms. Our opponents have focused on just one thing: the need to harmonize two taxes that are levied to two different levels of government at two different rates under two different sets of rules, collected by two different sets of bureaucrats. Frankly, that's nuts. We have one tax that we are proposing to reform. The tax was put in place nearly 50 years ago. The world has changed in 50 years.

Fifty years ago, most of the economy revolved around the manufacture, distribution and sale of tangible goods: things you could see and touch, things you could measure. Today, a great deal of the economy revolves around the sale of services, and one doesn't speak anymore about a tangible good per se. The kind of business we attract in Ontario involves the bundling of professional services, goods, fees and all other things that those who framed the now obsolete retail sales tax 50 years ago couldn't have been expected to imagine. That's just one part of the reform.

Under the reform, some—wait for it—93% of Ontarians will pay less tax. Ninety-three per cent of the people who are watching this right now: After Ontario's proposals are implemented, should this House approve them, your tax bill is going to be lower. That's good. If you're running a small business, your taxes will be lower. This is going to be the most friendly place in North America to be able to come and set up a new business. This is the place that people are going to come to innovate.

I'd like to conclude my remarks here. Thank you very much for the time. My colleague from Ottawa—Vanier will take it from here.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Je voudrais aujourd'hui vous lire une lettre qui a été publiée dans le *Droit* aujourd'hui, écrite par le président du Collège Algonquin, M. Gillett, la présidente de La Cité collégiale, M^{me} Lortie, la présidente et vice-chancelière de l'Université Carleton, et le recteur et vice-chancelier de l'Université d'Ottawa. La lettre se lit comme suit:

« En tant que dirigeants d'universités et de collèges d'Ottawa, nous avons conscience du lien vital qui unit l'éducation et la croissance économique. La formation et l'enseignement peuvent transformer des vies et une main-d'œuvre qualifiée et compétente peut produire et attirer de nouvelles occasions de développement. Pour sa part, la recherche crée de nouvelles connaissances qui stimulent l'activité économique, attirent des investissements et rehaussent à la fois notre qualité et notre niveau de vie.

« Mais pour que tout cela arrive, le gouvernement doit comprendre ce lien et faire de l'éducation une priorité. Et c'est exactement ce que le gouvernement McGuinty a fait la semaine dernière.

« En investissant plus de 780 millions de dollars dans des projets d'immobilisations, le gouvernement de

l'Ontario permettra aux universités et aux collèges de moderniser leurs installations et d'augmenter leurs capacités à long terme en matière de recherche, d'enseignement et de formation professionnelle.

«Jumelés à une contribution de contrepartie du gouvernement fédéral, ces nouveaux fonds permettront à des campus aux budgets serrés de développer ou rénover leurs installations et se doter des équipements de pointe essentiels au maintien de leur dynamisme.

«De plus, le budget de cette année aidera l'Ontario à gagner, à l'échelle mondiale, la réputation d'une province qui se démarque dans l'économie du savoir et où le talent afflue. Les 715 millions de dollars à l'appui de la recherche et des partenariats pour l'innovation, de même que les 10 millions consentis pour enrichir les bourses d'études supérieures.

«Nous saluons aussi l'investissement de 150 millions de dollars en aide immédiate non renouvelable destinée à atténuer les importantes pressions financières découlant de l'accroissement des effectifs étudiants et des frais de fonctionnement des universités et des collèges.

«Le gouvernement de l'Ontario a prévu du financement au cours des deux prochaines années pour la formation professionnelle et des initiatives d'alphabétisation. Les emplois de demain dépendent des programmes de formation disponibles aujourd'hui. Aussi, les universités et les collèges doivent être en mesure d'outiller adéquatement les travailleurs actuels et futurs. Qu'il s'agisse d'un finissant du secondaire à la recherche d'un diplôme collégial ou universitaire ou d'un adulte cherchant à perfectionner ses compétences, le résultat sera le même : une main-d'œuvre ontarienne hautement qualifiée.

«Le budget 2009 n'oublie pas l'entreprise privée; il propose entre autres une bonification substantielle du crédit d'impôt applicable aux salaires versés aux étudiants stagiaires inscrits aux programmes d'enseignement coopératif des universités et des collèges ontariens. De plus, le Réseau collégial pour l'innovation industrielle recevra 10 millions de dollars sur trois ans pour soutenir les petites et moyennes entreprises dans leurs activités de recherche appliquée, de transfert de technologie et de commercialisation.

«Une récente étude—commandée par le premier ministre Dalton McGuinty—sur les moyens d'assurer la prospérité et la compétitivité indique que l'Ontario "doit augmenter le pourcentage de jeunes qui fréquentent les collèges et les universités afin de créer un bassin de candidats suffisant pour pourvoir les postes exigeant une éducation postsecondaire, ce qui représente 70 % des emplois qui seront créés au cours des prochaines décennies".

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«Le gouvernement McGuinty mérite un "A" à son bulletin pour avoir inscrit l'éducation, la recherche et la formation professionnelle parmi les priorités de son budget 2009.»

These college and university presidents believe that the McGuinty government deserves an A on their report

card because they have put an emphasis on education, research and professional training among the priorities in the 2009 budget.

Ça me fait plaisir de me lever aujourd'hui pour parler sur ce budget, un budget dans un temps où la conjoncture économique est quand même assez chancelante. Nous ne sommes pas la seule province, nous ne sommes pas le seul pays, mais partout en Amérique du Nord et au monde, on vit des bouleversements économiques qui ne se sont pas vus depuis la fin des années 1930 et le début des années 1940. Moi, j'applaudis notre budget, et je félicite mon premier ministre pour avoir mis de l'avant un budget qui va non seulement aider les grandes entreprises à compétitionner avec les marchés extérieurs, attirer d'autres entreprises ici au Canada et en Ontario, mais aussi aider les plus démunis de notre communauté.

Alors, c'est un budget qui est vraiment balancé et qui aide aussi la classe moyenne. Souvent, la classe moyenne, c'est la classe qui est oubliée dans les budgets. Puis, cette année, ce qui est beau dans notre budget, c'est que tout le monde y trouve son compte dans ce budget-là, que ce soit les grandes entreprises ou la petite et moyenne entreprise. On sait que les petites et moyennes entreprises sont le cœur de l'économie ici en Ontario parce qu'elles créent la majorité des emplois, et nous devons les appuyer. Nous devons les aider à se renouveler, les aider à devenir ou à rester compétitives, les aider aussi dans la formation, à former les gens dont ils ont besoin pour aujourd'hui et pour demain.

On sait, comme disaient les présidents des collèges et universités, que dans les prochaines années, 70 % des emplois qui vont être créés vont demander un diplôme collégial ou universitaire. Alors, il ne faut pas attendre, il faut le faire aujourd'hui. On a commencé, nous, depuis 2003 à investir dans la formation. C'est un investissement qui est sûr. Je dis toujours, aujourd'hui, vous faites mieux d'investir dans l'éducation et la formation, parce que ce sont des investissements sûrs. Je ne peux pas en dire autrement, là, quand on met son argent dans la banque, mais la formation dans le collège, l'éducation, c'est une formation sûre.

Je m'en voudrais aussi de ne pas mentionner l'investissement que l'on continue à faire du côté de la santé. Mes deux présidents, M. Gérald Savoie de l'Hôpital Montfort et M. Jean Bartkowiak du Centre Bruyère, sont très heureux des investissements qu'on a faits jusqu'à date dans le domaine de la santé et qu'on continue à faire. On sait qu'on a une population qui est vieillissante. On va toujours avoir besoin de plus de soins de santé parce qu'on a une population qui vieillit. Les «Baby Boomers» vieillissent, alors on ne peut pas réduire nos investissements en santé. C'est ce que l'on entend encore. Nos personnes âgées veulent s'assurer qu'elles vont pouvoir bénéficier des bons soins de santé.

Ça commence encore par la formation. C'est de former nos professionnels de la santé, encourager nos jeunes à aller dans les professions de la santé. Moi, lorsque je suis entrée pour faire mon cours d'infirmière, c'était la quatrième profession que les femmes

choisisaient, et la dernière fois que j'ai vérifié, c'était la 68^e profession que les femmes choisissaient. Alors, il faut les encourager en facilitant la formation, en les aidant, parce que moi, j'ai fait mon cours dans un hôpital. Maintenant les jeunes font leurs cours dans un collège ou une université. Lorsqu'ils arrivent dans le milieu hospitalier, ils sont un petit peu intimidés par ce qu'on leur demande de faire et ils n'ont pas la monitrice qui est à côté d'eux autres pour les aider. Alors, en gardant nos infirmières d'expérience—je ne dirais pas nos vieilles infirmières—elles peuvent les appuyer lorsqu'elles arrivent dans le milieu du travail et, de là, freiner le décrochage, je dirais, des jeunes infirmières lorsqu'elles arrivent dans le milieu hospitalier.

Aussi, c'est d'accueillir nos médecins qui arrivent ici au Canada, qui arrivent de l'étranger et qui ont une formation souvent très comparable à celle de nos médecins ici, alors qu'on puisse les aider à s'adapter en leur offrant soit une formation de pointe ou une résidence pour qu'ils puissent par la suite nous faire bénéficier de leurs talents et de leur formation.

Alors, du côté de la santé, on ne pourra jamais réduire.

Il faut investir aussi dans la prévention, ce qui a toujours été négligé. À peu près 10 % à 12 % du budget était investi dans la prévention. Il faut investir plus dans la prévention, et c'est à travers nos centres de santé communautaires, nos centres de santé familiale.

Je suis heureuse d'appuyer le budget, et oui, l'harmonisation de la taxe de vente. C'est ce que nos entreprises nous demandaient. Elles vont utiliser beaucoup d'argent avec l'harmonisation, et la petite et moyenne entreprise favorise—et les grandes entreprises, bien sûr.

Alors, madame, merci beaucoup, et je vous félicite encore pour votre nouvelle position.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments on the speech on the budget motion from the member from Mississauga—Streetsville. He spent quite a bit of time talking about the education system and all the wonderful things that the current government has done. I would just like to bring some perspective from my riding of Parry Sound—Muskoka.

He was talking about the wonderful condition of the schools. I would invite him to come and look at Parry Sound High School, which I would argue is in need of repair and replacement; I would ask him to look at Huntsville High School, which, I would say, similarly is an old school that needs to be replaced; and also the fact that in Parry Sound they've gone through the accommodation review process for a primary school. They spent a lot of time at it and decided that the best thing to do was to close two schools and open a brand new school, but now the government hasn't reacted. That happened a while back, and their community is patiently waiting for some sort of announcement from this government.

I would also like to highlight the fact that in today's Toronto Star, the chair of the Toronto District School

Board points out how the government's salary negotiations are resulting in cuts to student services. He says:

"The government's decision to raise school board salaries by up to 12.55% over four years triggered a budget trade-off that comes at the expense of support for students....

"[D]ue to the latest budget, the Toronto District School Board will now have to absorb \$16 million in specific budget-line cuts to textbooks, computers and the professional development of teachers. More troubling is a \$2-million cut to support special needs children and a \$4.8-million (3.8%) cut in Learning Opportunity funds used for educational assistants, school safety measures, social workers and outdoor education."

That's the chair of the Toronto District School Board, who's saying that the salary negotiations that have been negotiated are going to result to cuts in services to kids who most need it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais faire quelques commentaires suite à la présentation de la députée d'Ottawa—Vanier.

Dans un premier temps, elle nous a lu une lettre des collèges et universités de la région d'Ottawa que je n'avais pas lue, mais qui me surprend parce que moi, j'ai fini ma maîtrise à l'Université Laurentienne à Sudbury en 1987. En 1987, j'allais à l'école dans un « portatif » parce qu'il n'y avait pas assez de salles de classe à l'Université Laurentienne pour tous les étudiants de maîtrise. On est maintenant en 2009, et les mêmes « portatifs » sont encore là parce que l'université ne reçoit pas un financement suffisant pour venir à bout de renouveler leur infrastructure.

Je ne sais pas d'où les universités d'Ottawa tiennent pour acquis qu'elles vont recevoir des fonds, mais je peux vous dire que l'Université Laurentienne, elle, voudrait bien recevoir des fonds d'infrastructure, et je peux vous dire qu'il n'y a pas une étudiante qui a hâte de retourner dans les « portatifs ». Les portatifs étaient vieux en 1987, quand j'étais là. Maintenant ils sont rendus très vieux. Il y a des maringouins qui rentrent là-dedans l'été : vraiment déplaisant. En tout cas, j'espère qu'il y aura de cet argent-là qui viendra à Sudbury également.

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Le deuxième est par rapport au décrochage des infirmières. Ça prend un certain culot pour dire que c'est parce que les infirmières sont mal formées, qu'elles ne sont pas prêtes à travailler dans les hôpitaux. Moi, je vous dirais plutôt que quand le gouvernement fait des promesses de 9 000 nouveaux postes d'infirmière puis qu'il ne tient pas sa promesse, ça décourage une infirmière.

La semaine dernière, j'ai lu la liste d'une cinquantaine d'hôpitaux qui ont soit diminué les heures de soins infirmiers, qui n'ont pas fait de recrutement pour des postes vacants, ou qui ont tout simplement mis des infirmières à pied. Ça aussi décourage une ou deux infirmières de se lancer dans la profession. Moi, je trouve

que nos infirmières sont bien formées. Ce serait les respecter, que ce gouvernement-là respecte leur engagement d'en embaucher 9 000 nouvelles.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Madame la Présidente, laissez-moi vous dire que j'étais vraiment enchanté d'entendre l'exposé de la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires et ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones.

Je dois dire que les points sur lesquels elle a touché reflètent vraiment ce qui était inclus dans le budget. Le premier ministre Dalton McGuinty a toujours dit qu'on doit voir à l'avenir de nos Ontariens et Ontariennes. Elle a bel et bien mentionné que dans quelques années d'ici, 70 % des entreprises seront à la recherche de personnes diplômées des collèges et universités.

Les investisseurs qui veulent venir s'implanter ici même en Ontario veulent toujours s'assurer que nous avons la main-d'œuvre disponible pour rencontrer les besoins mondiaux—je dis bien mondiaux—non seulement sur le côté d'avoir les argentés nécessaires pour la formation, mais on doit s'assurer que nous avons sur place l'équipement pour donner cette formation-là. Lorsque je regarde maintenant, presque tout est robotique. Si les collèges auxquels on a référés, les trois collèges, n'ont pas l'équipement en place, comment voulons-nous donner la formation nécessaire à ces personnes ?

Donc, je crois qu'il est très, très important. C'est un budget d'avenir pour nos Ontariens et Ontariennes. Madame la ministre a bel et bien touché les points qui sont très, très importants lorsqu'on regarde la formation et le développement pour les jeunes de notre province afin d'assurer l'avenir de notre province.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to add some comments to the speaker from Mississauga–Streetsville and also just a few comments. This budget is a triple-crown budget in tax-and-spend: the largest deficit and doubling of the debt on top of the largest tax hike in history. I think the Premier and the government hit the triple crown there. It was interesting to listen to a number of the comments from the member, also talking about increased spending and investments in schools and institutions to increase the viability of those institutions, which no one would argue with.

The only argument we would have is that they're doubling the debt from \$111 billion, when they took office, to over \$200 billion, and that debt will have to be paid on the backs of our children and grandchildren down the road. That debt will have to be paid. That's the only concern we've asked about is, have they got a plan in place to do that? They're relying on revenue growth that they're predicting into the future. No one could predict the situation we're in today, as one member said earlier, so I don't know how they can rely on those revenue growth projections out into the future as well.

I've heard from a number of people in my riding. Most of those people, so far, have not been in favour of

this budget; they've panned it, actually. We'll listen to the rest of the debate, and I look forward to comments from other members as the afternoon goes on.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Member from Mississauga–Streetsville has up to two minutes to respond.

M. Bob Delaney: Je veux dire merci à ma collègue la députée d'Ottawa–Vanier.

To my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka, five years from now we'll be talking about the success of the comprehensive tax measures that were set in motion in the budget of 2009-10. Make no mistake, no matter how many elections we're talking about, no future government will take us back 50 years to the way we did stuff in the 1940s and the 1950s.

To my colleague from Nickel Belt: In fact, nurses are very well trained in Ontario, and we look forward in the years ahead to hiring an additional 9,000 of them and to see them in our hospitals, administering care.

To my colleague from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell: merci pour vos remarques. Ce budget saura créer une économie forte et dynamique qui est capable de générer les nouvelles carrières du 20^e siècle.

To my colleague from Sarnia–Lambton: These measure are exactly what Ontario needs to emerge from this current global recession, a global recession that didn't start here, a global recession in which our principal challenge is to position the companies that are going to create wealth, create jobs, create opportunities right here in Ontario. We need those companies to be globally competitive, and one of the clearest ways that we can do that is to remove a significant impediment to them, and part of that is the series of comprehensive tax measures which, as I said in my remarks, will benefit 93% of Ontario's taxpayers.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate? The member from Nepean–Carleton.

Applause.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the applause from my very good friend and colleague on the other side.

The very first time I was elected to this chamber was three years ago last week, and I had an opportunity to—

Applause.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much. My first opportunity to speak in the Legislature—we all know we have our maiden speeches. Well, my maiden speech was on the budget for 2006. As members who were here at the time would recall, the budget was actually tabled and presented in this chamber during that by-election. At the time, Ontarians from Toronto–Danforth sent a New Democrat; Ontarians from Whitby–Oshawa—Whitby–Ajax at the time—and Nepean–Carleton sent two Conservatives. We heard daily, going door to door, about the issues that were either in the budget at the time or weren't addressed in the budget.

For example, during that debate, farmers had received the brunt of cutbacks, and that was very important in Nepean–Carleton, and it still is. But what it reminds me of—and it brings me back, in a sense, to my roots, my

ability during that period of time to speak with so many constituents on a daily basis at their doorstep and hearing about what their concerns were. It doesn't take a genius when you go door to door that you don't need a polling firm; you just need to hear the good folks we represent. I have, ever since that day, represented them on some very core values, which are stronger families, safer streets and self-reliance.

Members in this chamber from the city of Ottawa or anywhere near will know the name Aubrey Moodie. Aubrey passed away last year, just shy of making his hundred-year birthday, but Aubrey was also a man—although a Conservative, he was the founder of Nepean. He rooted Nepean's pay-as-you-go philosophy and later would be not only the mayor but the long-time reeve. He was a farmer who was very centred on the value of self-reliance and living within your means and again, as I said, putting in place a principle in the former city of Nepean which was very much pay-as-you-go, so you didn't incur debt.

At the time, before amalgamation, the city of Nepean was actually the envy of what is now the city of Ottawa and the 11 municipalities that comprise the new city of Ottawa because it was able to spend within its means and build the proper infrastructure and still have money in the bank. In fact, when it went into amalgamation, Nepean actually had millions of dollars in reserves that have thus far been spent by the new city of Ottawa. At the time, I remember standing here in my place, humbled that I had an opportunity to address this chamber, and through this chamber directly to my constituents, on the values that they told me were important to them and which I had shared. Since then, I have now seen three budgets, none of which the folks in Nepean–Carleton have sent me here to support. In fact, of the e-mails and the phone calls and the people stopping me at the grocery store since this budget was tabled, I have not heard one positive sentiment from my constituents. I have heard from young mothers, many of whom my daughter shares time with their children—because I have a four-year-old and I tend to see parents at the library. They're concerned.

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I've been with business people from the Barrhaven Business Exchange. I spoke to a group of 50 business people the day this budget was tabled. They were concerned. On Friday, I hosted a semi-annual women-in-business breakfast, where over 100 businesswomen from Nepean–Carleton converge twice a year to talk shop. They were scared. There wasn't one of them that spoke positively about this budget or the rapid increase in the minimum wage or the double whammy which is called Bill 150, which we're in committee hearings for right now, which is The Green Energy Act, which will tax these business people even further.

I've had my share of phone calls as well, and people walking into the constituency office in Nepean–Carleton, right in Barrhaven, telling me that this budget will be bad for them. I look forward to reading into the record a number of e-mails that I have received from my

constituents on what they believe this budget will do to them and to our community. I just want to speak, before I get into a few of the issues around the harmonized sales tax, which is, I think, perhaps my biggest beef with this legislation, about the economic circumstances surrounding our province.

You know, it was only last year when we stood in this chamber and the Liberals told us there would be a \$6-billion surplus. They were rushing money out the back door to get to municipalities in time to spend before year-end. They were talking about how great Ontario's economy was. At the time, though, we were warning them on this side, in the official opposition, that we were headed for have-not status in Confederation, that this economic downturn was looming, and that their spending, as unprecedented as it was, was also unsustainable. A few short months later, I believe six months later, we all stood in this chamber again when the grave news was delivered by the finance minister of this province, Dwight Duncan, that our province was going to be \$500 million in the red. He hadn't seen it coming, though we had been warning him on this side for a very long period of time prior to that.

Today, we see employment in Ontario that is at its highest rate in 12 years. Ontario's spending has skyrocketed past \$100 billion. It was only 20-some short years ago when my colleague Mr. Miller's father, Frank Miller, was the Treasurer of this province and spending had reached \$18 billion; just to give you an indication of how rapidly this government has grown spending, again, at an unsustainable rate.

Since this government has taken office, almost 300,000 manufacturing jobs have up and left. To put that into context—that's an easy number to say, and wow, it sounds scary. But do you want to know something? Those 300,000 jobs that have been lost mean 300,000 moms and dads are not working in this province. It means 300,000 people trying to pay a mortgage are finding it a little bit tougher. It means 300,000 people trying to put a loved one through university or through increased medical costs or trying to purchase their first home or their first car had a few of their dreams dashed.

I think that we have to put this into perspective. When I was, I don't know, I must have been 12 or 14 years old, my dad was laid off. It was the late 1980s, early 1990s; maybe I was a little bit younger. But I will never forget that: the look of a father's face who is the breadwinner in the family, coming home, scratching his head, wondering, "How am I going to put groceries on the table?" Well, guess what? That's happening to almost half a million people in this province right now. And what have they done? They've raised their taxes by 8%.

How could you do that, especially when we look in this document of the 2009 Ontario budget, and on page 95 we look at the interest on the debt? I want to talk about not only the economic circumstances, but right now, I want to talk to debt and deficit.

On page 95, we look at the expenses that this government has incurred. It says that on programs, we're

at \$100 billion, which I mentioned. The interest on the debt—I want Ontarians who are listening to sit down, because they are going to be shocked that we are spending \$11.1 billion on paying people in New York who are bond raters, to the tune of \$1 million an hour, to meet that debt: \$11.1 billion, and it's going to grow. It's going to grow because spending hasn't been reduced, it's going to grow because taxes keep going up, and the people of this province are sending their hard-earned tax dollars to New York to foreign lenders.

That \$1 million an hour isn't being spent on the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge, which desperately needs to be built to connect two of the most vibrant villages in the city of Ottawa. It's not being used to put another MRI at the Queensway Carleton Hospital, which we found out just weeks ago is desperately required. That \$1 million is not being put to use on brand new schools that are needed in high-growth communities or to fix the crumbling infrastructure that we see in the city of Ottawa.

By the way, the last statistic I received from the Ottawa heavy construction association on what is needed to fix the current and crumbling infrastructure in the city of Ottawa is \$1 billion. That's one eleventh of the money that we're sending to New York to financiers on our debt.

This budget has brought in the largest deficit in Ontario's history. The McGuinty Liberals, in seven short years, will have doubled our debt from \$100 billion to close to \$211 billion.

On top of that—and I look forward to speaking to this a little bit more as I proceed—is the single largest tax increase in Ontario's history.

I remember when I was still a young staffer in Ottawa.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: You're still young.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm still young. I was a young staffer in Ottawa, and I remember that the current member for Ottawa West-Nepean, who was the previous MPP for Nepean-Carleton, the transportation minister of this great nation, John Baird—I remember when the Liberals brought in what we thought was the single largest tax increase in Ontario's history, the tax hike called the health premium, which goes to roads and sewers, not health care. I remember him, and I remember listening on CFRA that day for this budget that Mr. McGuinty was going to deliver. I remember that Mr. Baird at the time—I believe he was actually ejected from the Legislature, because he believed so strongly, as did the residents he represented then and the residents I represent today. They vehemently opposed the fact that they were tax-hiked.

What they equally opposed was that they were told one thing during an election, and they were given another thing after that election. They were told, "No new taxes." This is the second time we've heard, "No new taxes." It's also the second time since this government has taken office that we have been confronted with the largest tax hike in Ontario's history. That, I will tell you, is a challenge.

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Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Pass it on to your grandchildren.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: When we talk about grandchildren—I talk about my own daughter, obviously; I have a daughter of similar age to my colleague from Simcoe North's granddaughter—it's that generation who are going to be paying for this excessive spending. The budget predicts a decline in the GDP of 2.5%, a further decline in corporate profits of 25% and a 2% decrease in employment, with 135,000 job losses within the next year. The revenue for 2009-10 is projected at \$96 billion, but total spending is projected at \$108.9 billion. That's up 58% since 2003. Program spending for 2009-10 is projected at \$99.6 billion, up 69% since 2003. The government is now projecting a \$3.9-billion deficit in 2008-09 and a \$14.1-billion deficit in 2009-10.

Let's get this straight: A year ago today we were debating a \$6-billion surplus, and in the last 12 months we have seen that \$6-billion surplus equate to a \$3.9-billion deficit—not exactly money managers over there.

Let me talk about what I think is probably the most egregious point in the 2009 budget, and that is the harmonized sales tax. I have never been a fan of the harmonized sales tax. I have seen what it has done to families across Ontario. I have seen what it has done to families across other provinces as well, but we are going to see very quickly what the people of this province are going to be confronted with.

For the sake of perspective for the folks at home, and of course those in this chamber—particularly those in the government who haven't yet briefed themselves on what the harmonized sales tax will do—the 2009 budget will increase the cost of a variety of items, starting on Canada Day, 2010. Here's a partial list.

Prepared foods sold for \$4.00 or less, so those folks who are heading off to Tim Hortons on a Monday morning to buy coffee and doughnuts for the crowd at work—it's going up by 8%. The gasoline they're going to use to get to work and pick up those increased-price coffee and doughnuts is going to go up. The newspaper on their way to work—the Ottawa Sun and the Ottawa Citizen—are now going to go up by 8%. The stamps they're going to use for postage to pay their bills—8% more. Their home heating fuel, Internet access fees, home renovations, financial services, gym fees, snow-plowing, bus fares, taxi fares, train fares, homes over \$500,000, courier fees, landscaping are all going to be subject to an 8% increase.

Let me talk to you about what I find is probably the most dim, dark and twisted initiative in this budget. They are going to, in fact, increase funeral services by 8%.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Oh, no. That can't be true.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's true. We've all heard that taxes and death are inevitable, but thanks to Mr. McGuinty and his Liberals, the HST and the plan they're putting in place will add a 13% death tax to all funeral services, from caskets to tombstones to flowers to virtually everything to do with a funeral. This government is taxing us to the grave, and now they will tax us into death. I asked earlier today if the minister responsible for consumer services would exempt funeral

services or, at the very least, grandfather funeral services that are prepaid up to July 1, 2010, and he refused to answer.

According to the Board of Funeral Services, the average cost of a funeral in Ontario is around \$5,500, and when you add flowers, reception and casket, the costs go up to anywhere between \$9,000 and \$10,000. We're talking modestly. At the rate this group is taxing people while they're living and now while they're dead, Ontarians will be paying \$1,200 more—at least—for funeral services.

My colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke made a statement today in the Legislature. Do you know what he said? “If they're not going to stand up for the living, at least they should stand up for the dead.” That's exactly what we're doing over here.

I'm going to conclude. I have a minute left, and I'm going to read into the record a few comments from the people of Nepean–Carleton, who sent me here to challenge this “say one thing, do another thing” government who promised them twice no new taxes and twice has increased their taxes substantially.

“Please add” my name “to, I am sure, the hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who are absolutely incensed over the harmonization tax the Premier has now proposed.

“He started off with ‘no new tax ...,’ then introduced the infamous health tax, and now the harmonization tax. We are seniors on pretty fixed incomes. We do not get the right to negotiate for any pension increase....

“We plead to you to exercise whatever means you and your party can do to stop this total madness....

“John and Carol-Lynne Cyr.”

To Mr. McGuinty: “The purpose of this e-mail is to express my disgust at the blatant tax grab associated with the tax harmonization proposed by the Liberal government.... As a former Liberal supporter, I want to advise you that I will be transferring my full support to the PC or NDP, whichever party I believe can defeat your government....

“Barrie Reynolds,” Nepean.

To Mr. McGuinty: “I would like to apply for a bailout grant. Because of the soon-to-be much higher cost of owning a house in Ontario....

“First we had the terrible health tax....

“Next higher municipal taxes....

“Next the introduction of smart meters....

“And the last straw—the big tax grab of the harmonized” sales “tax.

“Hugh Turner, Nepean.”

“I am sending this email to protest the harmonized” sales “tax. I realize it is not the Conservatives bringing this tax in. However, I hope if enough people protest this, it will be reversed.

“Pam Champagne,” Nepean.

“As a taxpayer of Ontario I would like to you know that I am vehemently opposed to the HST”—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I have some strong sympathy for the arguments that the member from Nepean–Carleton makes. I feel her anger. It's palpable. She argues that the Liberal government is leaving a deficit to her grandchildren and others.

I can just imagine how angry she is with Mr. Harper as well. Although she doesn't express it, I think it's bubbling inside, and it's exploring a way to get out. She hasn't been able to find that opportunity yet to attack Mr. Harper, but I'm waiting for it; I really am. I'm looking forward to her and other members attacking Mr. Harper for the wasteful spending and the fact that he's leaving our grandchildren and their grandchildren an approximate deficit from \$50 billion to \$87 billion. How could a good Tory do that? You've got to go after him. You have to—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Don't worry. I did.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Because I can feel the anger that you have. Don't hold back.

With respect to the issue of harmonization, I feel your anger as well. I can feel how angry you are with Jim Flaherty for agreeing to go along in the backrooms and give \$4 billion to the government so that he could do this harmonization. I know how angry you are—just say it publicly. Don't hold back. Just say it, express it, how angry you are with Harper and all the federal Tories—including Monsieur Ignatieff, our most learned of men, our most erudite of men, who is also supportive of this harmonization. Go after them. Let your heart out. Don't hold back the way you are.

By the way, to the member from Leeds–Grenville, you've got to tell him: “Why did you say in theory you support it?” Ask him to take it back. Don't hold back.

And John Tory—you tell them how you feel. Don't hold back. Give it all you've got.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That's what you're here for. I can see you holding back. Don't do it anymore. Don't do it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Speaker, and congratulations on your appointment to the Chair. I'm sure you'll do a wonderful job.

There's been all sorts of rumours circulating out there about just what the Ontario budget is in 2009, just what it's going to mean for families and for individuals. I think Ontarians need a clear picture and I think, hopefully, this debate will bring that clear picture forward. Let's start to set the record straight on that.

1700

I think, first of all, we would all agree in this room that Ontario is in the grips of a global economic crisis. It's something we all need to come to grips with, all three parties that are represented here, and we need to do everything we can to get the people of Ontario through these difficult times and to build an Ontario that's ready to prosper when this turns around. The majority of Ontarians work for a business of some type, of some sort,

in a variety of industries, manufacturing, finance. When business is slow, it's simple: Workers suffer when business gets slow.

So what this budget has done is, it's provided Ontario firms and the companies that operate within our borders with the tools to increase global competitiveness, to attract people to begin to invest in this province in a way that's going to allow those businesses to prosper, and in a way, instead of laying off people, that companies are able to hire people, that we're going to start to be able to make announcements that Ford is hiring, GM is hiring and whoever else out there that's going through a tough time is hiring.

Now, to do this, Ontario has proposed a tax reform package that has some controversial aspects to it and something that we need to come to grips with in a mature way, and that's what this debate is all about. We're proposing, as part of the reform, to combine the two sales taxes paid into one. People should understand that that starts July 1, 2010, and it's going to combine the GST and the PST. We understand that that's going to be a hardship for some Ontarians, and we've proposed a program that's going to assist with that. I think, as the information is more forthcoming, people will begin to understand this more.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Simcoe North.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I forgot to congratulate you earlier on your appointment as Acting Speaker.

I fully support the comments made by my colleague from Nepean—Carleton. As a young mother and the youngest member in this Legislature, it probably has a bigger impact on her generation of people, more than anyone else or any other group of people in this House, because the impact will be on Ontario families. We carefully caucused harmonization before this and came to the understanding in our caucus that this was just the wrong time to even consider such a huge tax increase on the citizens of the province of Ontario.

We haven't seen the tip of the iceberg for what the impact will actually be. For someone to stand on the opposite side and say that Ford's going to start hiring more people as of 2010, or General Motors—where do you get these kinds of numbers from? Must be the same people that drew the 300,000 new jobs out of the air, or the 50,000 green energy jobs. Where do people come up with these numbers? That's one of the things that I think is important in this House, that we start to ask the government to actually show us some data that would indicate where those jobs would be created—not just a speech and a comment on the Minister of Finance's speech.

So as we move forward, and we've mentioned this before already, I'm proud of my colleagues on this side of the House. They've taken a stand against this harmonization. We're adamantly opposed to it. We will not support this budget in any way, shape or form. We look forward to the government actually caving in on some of

these things, because we think there'll be a lot of things that they'll want to exempt as they take a lot of pressure from the general public and the citizens of the province of Ontario. And as we lead up to the election in 2011, I can see them actually caving on a lot of them.

M^{me} France G  linas: I wanted to make a few comments about the presentation that was made by the member from Nepean—Carleton and basically congratulate her on the way she was able to bring forward the views of her constituents toward the budget. Certainly, her party has a position on the budget, but she was also bringing forward the views of all of her constituents, basically, that speak of the worries and that speak of the negative perception that people from our ridings have of the budget because of the impact it will have on them and on their families. She was able to articulate that very clearly.

I thought her analysis as well as to what the debt and the repayment of the debt will mean—it means a whole bunch of opportunity lost; certainly, money that for many years in the future will have to be targeted towards the paying back of that huge debt. It's money that will not be available for creating strong programs and services for the people of Ontario. She was able to give some clear examples as to other ways that this money could be used for the good of the people of her riding, giving specific examples in health care with the MRI or other examples that we could certainly support.

So, well done. It's in the view of the Tories, which is not always something that I share fully, but I certainly share the example that she gave of her riding and the hardship that this budget will bring to the people of her riding.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Nepean—Carleton has up to two minutes to respond.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'd like to thank my colleague from Oakville, my colleague from Nickel Belt and my colleague from Simcoe North for engaging me in debate during the question period.

It's incredibly important that each member understands the budget document and its implications. When you look at seven consecutive deficits, the impact that will have on our overall debt, the problems we are going to have with our GDP, our unemployment rate—and certainly I think the biggest problem we're going to have is actually getting more Ontarians back to work. It's the name of the game. Self-reliance, meaning people working, with enough money to pay their own bills, send their own children off to school, and ensure that there's food on the table—there's no greater ability for any Ontarian than to be able to do that and work for their family.

We have in this province, no question about it, a struggling yet vast middle class who aren't looking for a handout or a big expensive government program. What they're looking for is opportunity. In the years of prosperity, the years of plenty, this province went on a massive spending spree and raided the cupboards bare. Right now we're in a moment that will be remembered

for generations to come as one of gloom and dimness. There could have been money saved during those periods of time, stored away for these rainy days that we are now faced with in this province, yet it wasn't, and now my generation and my children's generation will pay for it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I appreciate this opportunity to make a few comments on the 2009 Ontario budget this afternoon and to present a view that's a little bit different than that presented by my friend from Nepean—Carleton just a few moments ago.

Instead of doom and gloom, I'd rather think of hope, opportunity and change. Change is not always easy. Nobody likes change. I don't like change sometimes. In general, the human condition is one that doesn't like or want to promote change. However, in this moment, in this time, we have nothing else available to us but to change. The world has changed and we must change. We cannot do what we did in the past. We cannot follow the policies, the economy and the system of the past. So we have charted a route, and our finance minister and the Premier, along with other members of the government, have worked hard to create a path of change.

I want to start off in my few minutes that I have here by reading a little quote that I have, which reads as follows: "We believe that if men have the talent to invent new machines that put men out of work, they have the talent to put those men back to work." Once again: "We believe that if men have the talent to invent new machines that put men out of work, they have the talent to put those men back to work." That's what we're doing. That, by the way, was John Kennedy. Anyway, that's what we're doing. In this budget we have invested more than ever in making Ontario's economy more competitive, which will lead to job creation and ensure that as prosperity returns, Ontario's families benefit and businesses benefit as well. If families and businesses don't benefit, then we have not done our job. But I believe we will do our job.

1710

We're helping to develop new opportunities in the green economy by investing \$250 million in a new emerging technologies fund. These are new technologies. The BlackBerry itself came from Ontario. It didn't come from the United States or from Silicon Valley; it came from Ontario. Other technologies are out there to be invented, and we're trying to encourage those new technologies, because once those new technologies are created, they create jobs.

We're providing \$50 million over five years to encourage the development of a smart electricity grid. We're developing a new \$5-million Green Jobs Skills strategy, so that Ontarians have the skills they need to seize new opportunities in the emerging green energy sector. No word is used more these days than the word "green." We want to be green, and it's talked about here in this Legislature, it's talked about in the city of Toronto, it's talked about throughout Ontario and through-

out the whole world. One of the headlines in today's newspaper was that a large piece of the Antarctic shelf collapsed. Global warming is continuing, and we need to look at ways to divert the gases, the heat and the stuff that's coming out of our machines into something that's greener. We're committed to that as a government, and that is very clear in our budget here.

We're also investing \$100 million in support of new biomedical research. We're helping turn Ontario ideas into Ontario jobs with \$50 million for the innovation demonstration fund. We're building much-needed research infrastructure with \$300 million over six years. Think of the research that has come from this province. Insulin was invented here; it wasn't invented elsewhere. It wasn't invented in the United States or England or Europe or wherever; it was invented right here at the University of Toronto. So many other innovations and so many other medicines have been invented here. Mount Sinai Hospital and the other hospitals that line University Avenue, just south of here, are full of research facilities that continue to be on the front lines of new inventions, and we want to be there with them helping them create the new medicines, the new machines and the new things needed to make people live healthier, longer and better lives.

Ontario's entertainment and creative industries employ hundreds of thousands of Ontarians. We're providing approximately \$100 million per year in proposed tax relief and \$30 million in additional supports to these industries. Everyone knows that Toronto is called Hollywood North. We want to ensure that people come here, make movies here and invest here. People who are directing and acting and all the support crew, that whole long list you see at the end whenever you watch a movie: Many of them come to Toronto, do their work, and we help them come here and make this environment fertile for them to work in. This budget does that, but it also does a lot more.

I want to go on and point out some other key points—unfortunately, I don't have much time. There's another quote here: "I believe in human dignity as the source of national purpose, human liberty as the source of national action, the human heart as the source of national compassion, and the human mind as the source of our invention and our ideas"—again, using our minds the right way, not yelling and screaming at each other but thinking things through, allowing things to happen.

We worked with the city of Toronto and the TTC, and they have a list of priorities of what they want to see to improve transit in Toronto and the GTA. We are fully funding three of their top priorities with provincial dollars, one, to get people moving around the city and, two, to create jobs.

We'll have the York Viva BRT, which will connect and run across—it's a rapid transit system that will run across town. The estimated cost of that is \$1.4 billion.

We have the Scarborough rapid transit, and I know this well because it's located, or it starts off, in the riding of Scarborough Southwest. We're going to replace the

existing RT vehicles, which is long overdue, and upgrade the infrastructure along the 7.2-kilometre route from Kennedy station to McCowan station. The Scarborough RT will be extended to Malvern Town Centre, or Markham Road. It presently stops just past the Scarborough Town Centre. This is a significant change, and an increase.

The Scarborough RT connects commuters to the Bloor-Danforth subway, the proposed Sheppard East LRT and GO rail service. It's something that the TTC has asked for, for many years. We are finally acting on that. The TTC has put this on their list—we didn't; they did—and we said to them, "Because it's at the very top of your list, or near the top, we'll undertake to do this."

There are two other key projects that have been waiting to be done and sitting in a room of the TTC somewhere, which are now going to be brought forward. One of the most exciting ones, I think, is the Eglinton Crosstown RT. It's going to be a 30-kilometre east-west rapid transit line along Eglinton Avenue from Pearson International Airport to Kennedy station in Scarborough, with an extension to Malvern. It's going to include a 10-kilometre tunnel running through central Toronto. Commuters will be able to connect to other transit services, including the TTC, Eglinton West, Eglinton and Kennedy subway stations, and to GO Transit itself.

Again, the cost is expensive—it's \$4.6 billion—but we're building for the future. This is something that will be here for a long, long time. Every successful major city that I've been to has a functioning transit system and one that many people use. Ours needs this very badly.

The third thing is the Finch light rapid transit. This will extend from Yonge Street to Humber College and east to Don Mills subway station. Commuters will have better connections to the Yonge, Spadina and Sheppard subway lines and the proposed Sheppard Avenue East LRT. Again, the cost is expensive—\$1.2 billion. Again, my comments apply: This is something we need. It's an investment that we need.

One thing that I didn't mention earlier was the Scarborough rapid transit. The cost of that is \$1.4 billion.

These are significant dollars being spent in infrastructure. Again, these are well-thought-out ideas, because they're not thought out just by ourselves. They're ideas that were thought out by the TTC and brought forward there. We consulted with them and said, "What are your key priorities?" They gave them to us, and we're acting on them.

It's expensive, but it's worth it. It creates the city of Toronto, and beyond that, it allows people from the 905, from as far away as Hamilton or Burlington, to be able to access points in Toronto without having to use cars. Perhaps the idea of using transit vehicles will become a reality.

There's a saying from a few years ago, when someone ran for President, and it is, quite simply, "It's the economy, stupid." And here it is, and it is the economy. We don't have the option to sit pat today and not do any-

thing. We don't have the option to do nothing. We have to act.

We've created a plan—it's in our budget—and that plan has been extremely well thought out. The more I go into the details of this budget, the more I see that it serves to help the families of Ontario as well as the businesses of Ontario: 93% of Ontarians will receive a tax cut as a result of this budget. So we can hoot and holler all we want about the fact that we're going to harmonize the GST and the PST. But in the end, we're not going to make money from it. We're actually doing this to help business and to make things better. Provinces that have enacted this—there have been at least three; I think they're mostly east coast provinces—have all indicated that their economies run better and that the people are better off because of this harmonization.

1720

The harmonization is not something that just we support; the federal Conservatives support it: The finance minister, Mr. Flaherty; the Prime Minister, Mr. Harper; and the Conservative government itself supports the harmonization. So when our friends across the aisle stand up and say, "How dare you harmonize the PST and the GST," they shouldn't look this way; they should look towards Ottawa and ask why Mr. Harper and Mr. Flaherty are so in favour of this and why it has been so successful in the provinces where it has already been implemented. In fact—it was discussed earlier—in British Columbia they're thinking of doing it as well. Now some of the newspapers are saying that we want to do this thing as well.

There are all sorts of tax credits in here, and generous tax credits, that provide for savings. For example, if a family makes a total income below \$160,000, they will receive three payments from the provincial government totalling \$1,000. The provincial government will also provide permanent tax relief to people with low and middle incomes through one of the most generous refundable sales tax credits in Canada. This new credit will provide up to \$260 per year for each adult and child.

I want to underline one other point. If people listening are not concerned with what I have to say, at least remember this one point—and it's kind of hidden in the budget, but it's quite important—a 16.5% cut in the tax rate on the first \$36,840 of taxable income earned by all Ontarians. So when you do your income taxes and you have to do the part that is exempt from taxes, we're going to have a larger portion that's exempt from taxes than any other province. No other province will have this sort of tax relief. When I do my income taxes in the years ahead, I will know that Ontario—not British Columbia, not Quebec, not Nova Scotia, but Ontario—has the lowest income tax rate available in that portion that you don't pay taxes on at the start.

The list goes on and on. It would take me hours to talk about all of it, but I want to focus on a few last points. One of them is something that appeared in the *Toronto Star*. It was an editorial on April 4, 2009. I didn't write this. This didn't come from the Premier's office or from

any other Liberal office. This came from the Toronto Star, and I want to read it. The headline on the editorial for April 4 says, "Scaring Voters on Harmonized Tax."

"All week at Queen's Park, the opposition Conservatives have been hammering the Liberal government's plan to 'harmonize' the GST and the provincial sales tax. They have called it 'the biggest tax grab in Ontario's history' and 'a war on Ontario families.'"

"There is a word for this: demagoguery, or pandering to people's fears in order to win votes."

"The Conservatives don't really believe that the harmonization of the two sales taxes is a bad idea. Indeed, in the recent past they supported the idea. That is understandable, because one of the biggest advocates of harmonization is their soulmate and former Queen's Park colleague, federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty."

"Flaherty likes harmonization because it would substantially lessen the tax burden on businesses, which he believes is too high. The provincial Conservatives used to believe that, too. Until now."

"Seeing an opportunity to lure middle-class voters away from the governing Liberals, the Conservatives are now attacking harmonization as a new tax on everything from the Internet to home heating fuel. 'Even on a cup of Tim Hortons coffee,' intones interim Conservative leader Bob Runciman."

"These and other items are currently subject to the 5% GST but not to the 8% provincial sales tax. Under harmonization—due to take effect July 1, 2010—they will all be subject to the combined 13% tax, thereby increasing the burden for consumers. But this would be offset in two ways."

"First of all, experience in the four provinces that have already harmonized their sales taxes shows that consumers benefited as businesses reduced their prices"—not increased their prices, reduced their prices—"to reflect their lower costs, as their inputs were no longer subject to the provincial sales tax."

"Secondly, the Ontario government has wisely taken steps to ease the tax burden on individuals, including a one-time payment of \$1,000 to every family with a combined income below \$160,000 and a permanent cut in the personal income tax rate and increase in the refundable sales tax credit." There are three different things there. "By the government's calculation, 93% of Ontarians will pay less tax as a result. That can hardly be described as a 'tax grab,' as the Conservatives have called it."

"The New Democrats are also opposing harmonization, on the ground that it will mainly benefit business. Unlike the Conservatives, they are at least being consistent; the NDP rarely support tax breaks for business."

"But it should be noted that the Ontario New Democrats recently called for a hike of one percentage point in the provincial sales tax to raise money for municipalities. That would have had roughly the same impact on consumers as harmonization."

"As well, the NDP's opposition to harmonization flies in the face of advice from most economists—including

left-leaning ones—who say the move will benefit the province by encouraging business investment, which in turn will create jobs."

"In sum, opposition to harmonization may be good politics, for both the Conservatives and the NDP. But it is bad economics and bad policy for the province and its people." That's the Toronto Star.

I only have a couple of minutes left, but I want to just tell a little story, and that story is this. I had an opportunity once to speak to a pollster who used to work many years ago for a Prime Minister—he now works in private practice—and he said something very interesting to me: "Why are all the head offices of all the multinational corporations gone from Ontario?" He asked me to name a multinational corporation that was here in Ontario, besides the banks—the Royal Bank, CIBC and Scotiabank and the other banks and so on. There are five of them I think, but beyond that, there are no other ones here. I couldn't think of a single company, whether it be Hewlett-Packard or whether it be Texas Instruments or whether it be Eli Lilly or any pharmaceutical company. They're all located in the United States, and there's a trickle-down effect because of this."

Because their head offices are there instead of here, if you want to get money—if you're a museum, an art gallery or a symphony—you go to the head office, and the person in the head office is located somewhere like Houston or Phoenix or Los Angeles or Pittsburgh. And guess what? They're going to give the money to those art locations and those places like the symphonies there, and not here. Here in Ontario, instead, we have to subsidize our art gallery—we don't mind doing it—and we have to subsidize so many of our other services because we don't have that same opportunity. Those people are gone."

In closing, the budget is smart. It's hard to understand, it's heavy to digest, but it makes sense, and I ask that all support—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to respond to the speech from the member from Scarborough Southwest on the budget motion. In his speech, he made reference to the government's green energy bill, Bill 150, and all the wonderful things they're doing to encourage green energy. It just so happens, today, the PC caucus had commissioned a third-party look at the bill, and particularly the costs that the bill is going to bring into the energy field in Ontario, because we just didn't buy the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure's line that costs would increase for energy consumers by 1%; that's what he has been repeating here in the Legislature. We didn't buy that. We didn't have the expertise in our caucus to really point out succinctly that that's not correct, so we commissioned London Economics, who are experts, to look at this situation. They are still working on it, but they had their executive summary summarizing it today, with a press conference with our energy critic, Mr. Yakabuski, and our leader, Mr. Runciman."

Basically, what they've pointed out is that the costs—they've made an estimate—are going to be far greater

than this 1%; it could be substantially greater. Also, they really question the projection of 50,000 jobs, pointing out there's only 35,000 jobs in total in the energy sector at this point. So really, this 50,000-job projection is just a number out of the air, and it's probably going to be remembered in the same way as the coal promise this government has made many times. They were going to shut down the coal-fired generation in 2007, and I think it's 2014 now. The 1% increase and this 50,000-job figure are really very questionable.

1730

M^{re} France Gélinas: I'd like to make a few comments to the presentation made by the member from Scarborough Southwest. I didn't agree with much of what he had to say, but I do agree on two points. The first one is the comments he made about the Conservative Party being in favour of the harmonized sales tax. This is certainly something that we have their previous leader, Mr. John Tory, on record as saying—that he supports the harmonization of the PST and GST. We also have Mr. Runciman saying that theoretically he supports the harmonization of the PST and the GST. I tend to agree with what the member has said, that this is a switch from their position from before, although they are arguing against it now. Some of the members are protesting against it with much energy. They are certainly on record as favouring it before. For the NDP, we have made our case clear: that we oppose harmonization.

The second part that he was talking about is the example that he couldn't think of any multinationals that were based in Ontario. I can tell you that Xstrata Nickel division, which is a company that has holdings everywhere from Europe to Australia, has their headquarters just down the road at the corner of Bay and Lakeshore, or in around there. Anyway, Bay Street is all the way down, and you can't miss it: They have a huge building, and they own it all.

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's a pleasure again to rise in this House and make a few comments about the budget. The honourable member from Simcoe North spoke about harmonization of retail taxes and indicated that this is going to increase taxes. Actually, the budget states that the revenue of the government is going to be reduced by a significant amount, and that will be by \$2.3 billion over four years. So harmonization of sales taxes with retail taxes is not going to increase taxes on individuals. Actually, the budget document addresses that point very well, and the tax cuts that will be included in the budget are going to reduce \$10.6 billion of taxes on individuals, which will affect 93% of Ontarians, and that is a significant number.

Again, when you look at this harmonization of taxes, this is something which our colleagues from the Conservative Party have supported all along. Their former leader and the current interim leader of the Conservative Party and also the federal Conservatives are supporting this. It is the right move in the right direction. Many, many countries around the world have only a single tax. We in Ontario are one of the rare jurisdictions where we

have two taxes. Harmonization of taxes is going to not only assist individuals, it's going to assist our businesses. At this time, we need to create jobs, we need to boost the economy, and this is one of the many elements of this budget where the designer of the budget intended to boost our economy at this very point.

I support this, and I hope our honourable colleagues from the Conservative Party will consider this.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I appreciate being able to make a few comments on the remarks of the member from Scarborough Southwest. I just want to make it clear that comments in the House today are trying to make it sound as though this caucus was all in favour of harmonization. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our leaders looked at it at specific times. Some provinces had done this, and the federal government was urging them to do so. We caucused this very, very carefully in our caucus on a couple of occasions.

The week before the budget, we asked a number of questions; they were all opposed to the HST. Clearly if you go back in Hansard, you'll find that, and the questions were asked by Mr. Runciman. Clearly, our caucus is unanimously opposed to the HST, the harmonization. We consider this to be a new tax on Ontario families. Specifically, it's at a very, very bad time in the history of this province. We don't think it's going to invigorate the economy. We don't think there will be a lot of new jobs created as a result of this.

I can tell you, in my riding of Simcoe North—as mentioned earlier, I was in front of around 500 people this weekend; many of them in the room were business people. Not one person came forward and said, “That HST is a good idea”—not one person. In fact, in our media, we had a lot of comments against this. Particularly, real estate agents and people in the legal field came forward and said, “You're on the right page. Do not support this. It's nothing but a new tax on the families of Ontario, and it will hurt business.”

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Scarborough Southwest has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Again, I want to thank the members from Parry Sound—Muskoka, Nickel Belt, Richmond Hill and Simcoe North for their comments. A number of the former members of the provincial Conservatives, Mr. Flaherty, Mr. Baird and Mr. Clement, who have all gone on to become federal ministers, all stand behind their leader, and that's clear. I would challenge anyone to go and speak to those individuals and ask them, “Do you support the HST or not?” I'm sure we know what the answer would be.

I want to finalize with one little quote, because I like quotes once in a while. Actually, this one is probably well-known: “All politics is local.” That's Tip O'Neill. What I want to say is this: All politics is local, so as a politician or as an individual, we all talk to people. I talk to my family members. I talk to my brother and sister, who both have children. There are eight children there. You look at the budget again, and when you talk about

the HST, if people want to start getting upset about it, all sorts of things for children, from car seats to some of the other things that are used by children, are all exempt from the HST.

The other thing I want to say, too, with regard to all politics being local, is that I speak to my father on a regular basis, and what he says to me a lot is, "What happened at work today? What's going on?" He watches the news; he knows what's going on. He said, "How come you're bringing in these new taxes?" But he didn't get the chance to hear the sound bite regarding the property taxes that he's going to save on, as well as the \$1,000 he's going to be eligible for, the \$300 he's going to be eligible for and the lower tax rate that he'll be in. After I explained it all to him, he supported the budget.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate? The member from Sarnia-Lambton.

Applause.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to my colleagues across the floor.

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yeah, I know, it's not too late.

The member was quoting. I'm a fan of Tip O'Neill as well. He said, "All politics is local." I think of another quote. I think it was P.T. Barnum—I don't think he was any relation of mine, Barnum and Bailey—who said, "You can fool some of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time." That was another quote.

Anyway, this budget is what we're speaking against. Here are some quotes I'm going to read in: "Ontario's Liberal government was among the last provinces to bring down its budget this year. Sadly, it was not a budget worth waiting for. Except maybe for historians" because it was the last one. "Dalton McGuinty has now secured his place in Ontario history, by adding the largest deficit in history to the largest tax hike in history."

1740

I was just watching a show last night on TV, *The Premiers*. Somewhere in the early 1950s, Premier Leslie Frost introduced the first budget in this House of a billion dollars, and that was a landmark. That was the first province in Canada, at that time, that ever spent a billion dollars. We go into the 1980s, the Honourable Frank Miller, I'm not sure exactly which year, but his budget was approximately \$18 billion. Then we move into the budget this year, and we're going to spend somewhere around \$108 billion, I think. So spending has increased. Of course, the services that are provided are a lot more today than in those days. I'm not sure whether the quality of life is any better; I guess some people would say it is. I watched that show last night, *The Premiers*, and it certainly was a different pace and it was certainly a different quality of life that Premier Frost and those other members who were in the House at that time on all sides of the House experienced, and I think sometimes we should go back to some of that. He worried over whether he would introduce twilight racing, because he thought it would lead to the decline of the family because of people

gambling and staying out late in the evening. They didn't even allow—and I don't think there's anybody in this room who's old enough, but maybe a couple on the other side there; I see some grey hair like me. When the trains went through Ontario, there was no liquor served on those trains for a number of years because he didn't think that was right. That was Ontario of the 1950s. It was certainly a far cry from today, and I'm not so sure that we've advanced.

While some news stories have focused on what will be exempted from this combined provincial and federal sales tax, the months ahead will be filled with very unpleasant surprises as people, the general public and the taxpayers, realize how much more they will be paying for everyday goods and services. You will pay more every time you fill up your car. You will pay more for home heating fuel. You will pay more for your cable, Internet and cellphone service, and you will pay more if you happen to need a lawyer to close that house purchase or sale.

The \$1,000 rebate that this government is promising to families will be more than offset by the \$1,100 or more in taxes—or why would they do it?—and it's only a one-time thing. I hope that the people are watching as they start to get their head around this, because a lot of people still don't even understand the impact, and that's what I think the government is hoping: that they can get it through the House, passed and implemented. They think that in this hurly-burly world we're in today, people will file it away. But I think after next July, when people start filling up their gas tanks, going to Tim Hortons or their local restaurant—especially the gasoline, where you're paying a tax on a tax—it will come back to remind them.

But the government says, "Don't worry." They promise to have Ontario back in the black by 2015. There's just one hitch: To achieve that goal, we require this McGuinty government to control their spending to a degree that they have never been able to so far. This government has increased program spending by approximately 8% every year since 2004, but they say they've learned their lesson and they will cut that rate by more than half in the years ahead. Now, this is a lot like Santa Claus saying he's going to lose 100 pounds and run a three-hour marathon nine months from now.

Like the last five Liberal budgets, this one is full of promises, many promises, but Ontarians are on to this government. They know that this government's promises are worthless. They promised no tax increases and then delivered the largest tax increase in Ontario's history. They loudly and repeatedly promised parents full-day junior and senior kindergarten. That promise has been quietly dropped—

Interjection: It's coming.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Some people say it's coming. The plan about transit, the 2020 plan, we're not sure if that's going to come or not. They promised skills training; that program has also been a failure. They promised 9,000 new nurses. But don't bother pressing the call button, because the nurses aren't coming either. The only thing

this government has always delivered on and kept their promise on is on higher taxes. That is one promise from the budget that we know they will keep.

This government had the good fortune to inherit a good economy, an economy that was able to survive shocks such as SARS and the blackout, but the government seems to have played out the old joke about the guy who woke up on third base and just figured he'd hit a triple. We in the PC caucus, along with many others, have warned the Liberals not to take Ontario's prosperity for granted. We warned them again and again not to raise taxes on families and the job creators of this province. We warned them not to keep growing the public sector, but they failed to listen.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Take your time.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you. On this government's watch, half of the new jobs created in Ontario were in the public sector, and many of these jobs were needed, in fact, for our lives and communities. But these jobs do not create wealth. They require the private sector to create wealth first. To put it simply, without the farmer, there is no teacher; without the construction worker, there is no nurse; and without the chef, there is no transit driver, and you could go on.

This government thinks that after these high taxes and red tape have destroyed Ontario's competitive advantage, they can just harmonize the sales tax, green-light some highway projects, and the jobs and investments are going to come running back to Ontario into their open arms. But that's not how the real world works, especially when provinces such as Manitoba and New Brunswick are keen to offer better investment environments than Ontario. Some media have referred to the province of Saskatchewan as "Saskaboom" because that economy there is thriving.

This Ontario government has had five budgets prior to this one, and not one of them focused on what this economy needed to keep creating wealth and jobs. Like the Premier, who went from being the education Premier to the innovation Premier to the whatever's trendy Premier, they have been short term and unfocused.

This government has called this budget "Confronting the Challenge." The Liberals haven't confronted Ontario's challenge for the last five years, and there is nothing in their past behaviour to suggest they're going to start now. The only thing that the McGuinty government means to confront is your wallet. They're like that old commercial on TV, "hands in your pocket."

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I love that commercial.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I do too. I like it as well.

When your house is on fire, it's a little late to start pricing the insurance policy. We know a number of people in the insurance business in the House.

One budget is not going to turn around five years of Liberal neglect. High taxes drove away these jobs and economic activity from Ontario. The Liberal solution is to lower some of the taxes they raised on business while increasing taxes on individuals. Unfortunately, our children and grandchildren will be paying a long time for

the McGuinty government's inability to learn from their mistakes.

Some of the highlights from this 2009 Liberal budget: This 2009 Liberal budget earns the McGuinty government the triple crown of tax-and-spend politicians, for the Premier himself, the largest deficit and a doubling of the debt on top of the largest tax hike in Ontario's history—the trifecta.

Spending: This budget predicts a decline in GDP—that's the gross domestic product, for those of you back in Inniskillin—of 2.5%; a decline in corporate profits of 25%; in fact, a 2% decrease in employment and 135,000 more job losses. This is their own document predicting this. They're predicting revenue for 2009-10 of \$96 billion, but total spending is projected at \$109 billion, up 58%, I would remind Madam Speaker, since 2003. Those people you hear outside I think are the small business people who are starting to protest. They're getting organized. I can hear them all the way in the House, and that's what we're going to hear as we go forward once people in the private sector and the small business people and the ordinary person realize how much more they're going to pay in taxes.

Ontario's total debt now stands at over \$200 billion, almost double the \$111 billion it was when the McGuinty government took office. Under Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, we will not see another balanced budget again until 2016, at the earliest. Now those are their numbers, not ours, numbers from the Treasurer's own budget. But to get there, the Premier, who has spent unheralded spending increases—to get there, the McGuinty government will have to hold growth in its program spending to less than 3.6% average, annually, between 2009 and 2012. However, that excludes non-core spending. After that program spending, he will have to be held to 2.3% annual average growth. However, until this year—this is the important part, and I know the member from Durham will know this well—Dalton McGuinty has increased program spending at an average annual rate of 8%. So to see them being able to cut back the spending regime that they're on—I think the proof will be in the eating of a pudding.

Tax hikes: Starting on July 1, 2010, Ontario will move to a single value-added sales tax. Gasoline, electricity, cellphones, Internet bills—I could go on and on. In fact, I will. I've got a couple of minutes, so maybe I will.

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Prepared food sold for \$4 or less, including coffee, doughnuts and snacks; electricity, gasoline, newspapers and magazines, haircuts, home heating oil, theatre admission, adult footwear costing \$30 or less, financial advisory services—it goes on and on and on.

Funeral services—a wag said earlier this morning that the Minister of Small Business hasn't stood up for business all along or for the living, so will he at least stand up for the dead? It sounds like they won't, because they're going to tax you before you die, on prearranged funerals; after you die, on the coffin; on the funeral service; and then when somebody is going in to settle up their poor

Aunt Mary's or Aunt Frieda's estate, there will be an 8% tax levied at that time. This goes on and on.

Bicycle safety gear—they talk about Bill 150, the energy bill. I call them the toaster police. They say they're going to create 50,000 jobs. We think they're going to basically be toaster police. If somebody has their toaster oven plugged in, they're going to get up and pull it out if it doesn't have the Energy Star rating.

Golf green fees are going to be increased, health foods, accountant services, furnace repairs—the member from Durham knows this well; he has lectured me about these increases in costs—courier fees, landscaping. I know he could go on ad infinitum. Did you want to speak to it? Domestic air travel will be increased, bicycles, legal services—the list goes on at great length.

This budget fails to provide Ontario families with the help they need in the face of the current economic crisis. This budget does not provide Ontarians with the plan they deserve, the plan to get our economy going again. The Dalton McGuinty response to a global recession was to raise taxes on Ontario's families, on heating fuel, gas at the pumps, monthly bills by cable, Internet and your cellphone.

Dalton McGuinty earned his place in history with the 2009 budget. He brought in the largest deficit in Ontario's history. He will have doubled the debt in seven years. This is on top of the single largest tax hike in Ontario's history. This, I say again, without repeating myself, is the triple crown for tax-and-spend politicians—the trifecta. The budget claims to confront the economic crisis. The only thing that this budget confronts is the taxpayer's wallet. The only people who benefit from this—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you. Pursuant to standing order 58(d), there having been eight hours of debate on the budget motion, I am now required to put the question.

On March 26, 2009, Mr. Duncan moved, seconded by Mr. McGuinty, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

On March 30, 2009, Mr. Runciman moved “that the motion moved by the Minister of Finance on March 26, 2009, ‘that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government,’ be amended by deleting the words after ‘that this House’ and adding the following:

“acknowledges that budget 2009 brings in the biggest deficit in Ontario's history of \$14 billion, when the McGuinty Liberals had a \$6-billion surplus just last year; and

“acknowledges that under this government's watch, nearly 300,000 manufacturing jobs have disappeared, with another 135,000 expected to be lost this year; and

“acknowledges that the Premier broke his promise not to raise taxes after the 2003 election by imposing a health tax of up to \$900; and

“acknowledges that the Premier again broke his promise with this budget by announcing his scheme to create a single sales tax, the biggest tax grab in Ontario's history, that will force people to pay taxes on everything from a cup of coffee to funeral services; and

“acknowledges that serial promise-breaking on tax increases, coupled with serial spending and mismanagement of public money, will not be tolerated by the people of Ontario.”

“Therefore, the government has lost the confidence of this House.”

The first question to be decided is the amendment to the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House that Mr. Runciman's amendment to the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say “aye.”

All those opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

We will be calling in all the members, and the division bells are limited to a maximum of 10 minutes.

I've just received, pursuant to standing order 28(h), a request that the vote on the motion by Minister Duncan, government order 20, be deferred until April 7, 2009, by the chief government whip.

Is it the pleasure of the House that this deferral pass? So ordered.

Vote deferred.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: We have no further business today. I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? The motion is carried. The House is adjourned and will reconvene tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1756.

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Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
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Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Brotten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	

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Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby—Oshawa	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora—Rainy River	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham—Kent—Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West—Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest—Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges—Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton—Springdale	
Johnson, Rick (LIB)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea—Gore—Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean—Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga—Brampton South / Mississauga—Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity—Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough— Westdale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa—Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron—Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York—Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	

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Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough—Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches—East York	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of International Trade and Investment / Ministre du Commerce international et de l'Investissement
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London—Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland—Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds—Grenville	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme
		Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier / Vice-premier ministre
		Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton—Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga—Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services / Ministre des Petites Entreprises et des Services aux consommateurs
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (LIB)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Perth—Wellington	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener—Waterloo	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
		Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
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Kevin Daniel Flynn, France Gélinas
Helena Jaczek, Sylvia Jones
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